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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 68, No. 2, Whole No. 393, AUG., 1976. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at $1.00 a copy. Annual subscription $14.00 in U.S.A., $15.20 in U.S. possessions and Canada; $16.40 in the Pan American Union and in all other countries. Editorial and Executive Offices, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Ct. 06830. Second-class postage paid at N.Y., N.Y., and additional mailing offices. *© 1976 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope, the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.*

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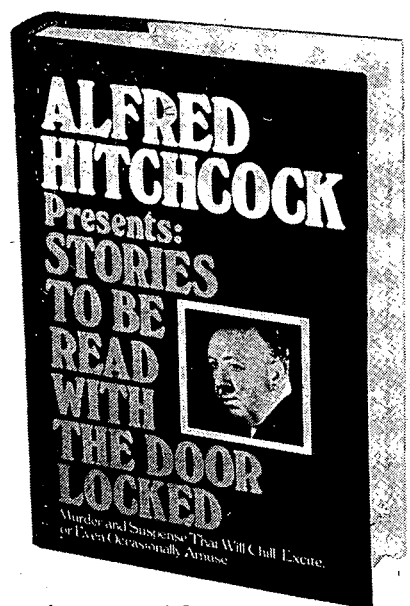
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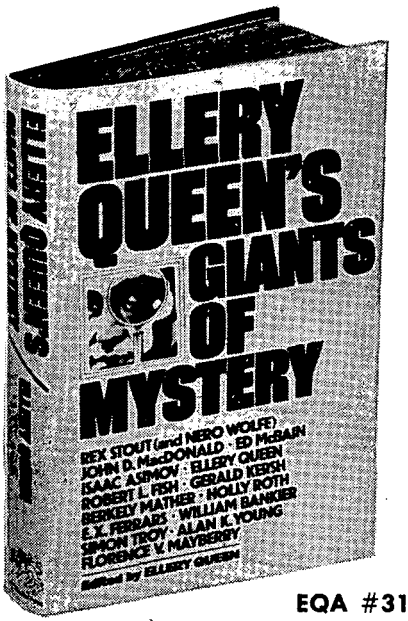
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NEW –

a story to celebrate the Bicentennial

by S. S. RAFFERTY

This story concerns events that took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on July 4, 1776. Some of the events are matters of history, some might be termed as "unrecorded." The historical facts changed the course of this country, and of the world. The "previously unchronicled" events contributed to that momentous change, and are food for historical conjecture. Here, then, is the account of the most important detective performance in Captain Jeremy Cork's career—a case before the Second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, in emergency secret session—a case in which you will meet, among others, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, John Jay, and a Philadelphia Thimblerig . . .

THE PENNSYLVANIA THIMBLERIG

by S. S. RAFFERTY

The oppressive blanket of heat that plagued the colonial seaboard in the summer of 1776 well matched the revolutionary fever in the body politic, and Captain Jeremy Cork's own seething indignation.

His choler arose from his failure to be elected a Connecticut delegate to the Second Continental Congress, despite the fact that he had given his ship, *The Hawkers*, to the rebel navy. It seemed the past events of Lexington and Concord had unleashed a civic unrest from which my employer was not immune. *The Hawkers* is, or was, the mainbrace of the financial empire I had constructed for him with patient yeomanry.

Ostensibly, his reason for coming to Philadelphia in late June was to oversee the ship's transfer to Commodore Hopkins, but I was not taken in by that ruse. Cork wanted a place of importance

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in these revolutionary doings, and, finding no opening, had decided to be as close to the hive as possible.

Thus, in addition to the swelter and recurring thunderstorms, I had to sustain the brooding and silent Cork. My evenings were made bearable by his absence from our rooms at Morby's in Spring Garden Street. He would spend the dark hours at the City Tavern with the various delegates and would come home cheered. But by daylight he became morose again.

It was mid-morning of 4 July when the first breeze in days rose up from the bay and wafted through the windows of our sitting room. I looked up from my reading of the *Gazette* to enjoy the zephyrs.

"The wind's up. It's a shame we don't have a ship to take advantage of it," I chided him.

"Consider her on loan," he said, dishing up another helping of oysters from the sea bucket in the corner. It was his third plateful of the day; since our arrival, shellfish had been the mainstay of his diet.

"A loan without collateral is often uncollectable," I said. This was our first interchange since dawn, and I feared I had now ended all conversation for the rest of the day.

"Oaks," he said, shucking a shell and sprinkling the oyster meat with Madeira and a pinch of dillweed, "you always manage to sound dangerously like a Tory."

Now there you have it! The main difference between us was this damnable war. I well realised the injustices of the King, and the possible need to rectify them with arms, but I am a man of commerce, a man who must protect an investment. Reconciliation on better terms was my thinking, not revolution and separation, which could destroy us all.

You will mark well I said the war was our *main* difference. There is another that has plagued me for years, and that is his excursions into the solutions of crime and skulduggery, which he calls "social puzzles." Yet, despite my previous misgivings about these puzzles, I found myself wishing that one would turn up, if only to occupy that fertile mind that was now so fallow.

Not wanting to sit in silence, I said, "I see your friend Dr. Franklin has lost his dog, and from the reward in this advertisement, he seems to be value the animal highly."

"Are you suggesting that I become a dogcatcher?" He glared at me.

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"Just making conversation, Captain. Might I ask, how long are we going to sit here doing nothing?"

He didn't answer, for a knock came at our door, and Morby himself entered. The portly innkeeper had a military man with him. The officer's blue coat, criss-crossed at the breast with white belting, and his bucktailed, cockaded hat bespoke him to be a Major of the Philadelphia Associators, a militia company of tradesmen. Yet the part-time soldier did not have the demeanour of a tradesman any more than he did of a military man. He was pale and thin, and his hands were milky white like those of a gentleman. Morby's introduction clarified the matter.

"Beg pardon, Cappin, sor, but Dr. Church would like a word with ye."

"Yes, Captain," the middle-aged soldier said, stepping forward. "I was at drill with the company at the State House Yard when Morby summoned me. I know of your reputation in such cases and would appreciate your help with Mr. Custis."

"By all means, Doctor. What seems to be Mr. Custis's problem?"

"He's dead, Captain. Dead by foul means, if I know arsenic poisoning when I see it."

I looked at Cork, who, for the first time in days, had a glint in his eye.

Morby clutched his pudgy hands. "I would sorely like ye help, Cappin. A man dying of pie-son makes the house look bad."

"Ah, then he's a guest here at the inn. Well, where away, man. What room?"

We followed our callers down the hall and up a landing to the third-floor attic.

"Came in two days ago, he did," Morby said, opening the door and showing us into a simple bedchamber. "Paid a week's advance."

It was a typical second-class room with a writing table, chair, and small cot upon which lay the corpse. The Captain examined the body and smelled the mouth.

"Arsenic, to be sure, Doctor," he said, testing the flexibility of the dead man's hand and arm. "Would you say he died not more than an hour ago?"

"Undoubtedly. I was about to summon the sheriff when Morby here mentioned your name."

"He should be summoned in any case. Have you been through his effects?"

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"We thought it best to have other witnesses," Dr. Church said.

"Yes," Cork said, walking to the writing table. "Did he take breakfast this morning, Morby?"

"No, sor, just asked for hot water, he did."

"To make himself some tea, no doubt." The Captain picked up a travelling cup and smelled it. "A deadly cup at that." He handed the container to the doctor, who sniffed it.

"Arsenic, Doctor. Look here. A box of green tea on the table, along with some orange peels. I think our Mr. Custis would have been better off to have availed himself of the pleasures of Morby's dining room below this morning. Well, who is he? Where is he from? And why was he poisoned? Morby!"

"Lor's be, Cappin, all I know, he was a gentleman in travel of some kind. From New York, I think he said."

"Yes," Cork said, returning to the bed, "a gentleman by clothing, but with the hands of a workman, and living in second-class accommodations. It is certainly strange."

I had been too busy watching Cork to fully take in the body. Cork was, as always, quick to observe minute points. The man's linen was expensive, yet somehow it did not go with the sunburnt face and rough hands, or the queue tied back with a fine silk ribbon.

"A bit incongruous," I said.

"Incongruity is often the nub of a puzzle, Oaks," Cork said, opening a travelling case he had drawn from under the cot. He dumped the contents onto the bare floor.

"Incongruity, indeed," he frowned. "Our Mr. Custis lies in death in a fine brocade suit, yet his satchel yields raw buckskin breeches and vest, worn boots, and rather despicable hose." The box also contained a quill, a small slate, an hourglass, a book of Common Prayers, and a sharp dagger.

Dr. Church, who had been going through the table drawer, held up some strips of paper. "Could this have any meaning, I wonder?"

Cork came across the room, took the seven strips, and examined them. They were white, thin, and no more than a quarter of an inch in width by about twelve inches in length. He mused over them for a few moments and then took them to the window, where he held each one up to the sunlight.

"Most interesting," he said, after a careful study. "Doctor, I trust that you can handle the details here as far as the corpse is

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concerned, and Morby, I leave you to deal with the sheriff."

"But, sor, sor," the innkeeper pleaded, "the suspicion on the house!"

"As likely not, Morby. He brought his death in with him in the tea. You only supplied the water. Come, Oaks."

We started to leave when the good doctor called after us. "Begging your pardon, Captain, but you are taking those strips with you. If they are important, and you seem to think they are, shouldn't you leave them here for the sheriff?"

"Under the rules of evidence in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania I would agree, Doctor, but this transcends boundaries. Pay my respects to the sheriff and tell him I will be in touch with him."

"Well, this leaves me in a rather precarious position. After all, I am only a physician. Where can you be reached?"

"On Bristol Road at the home of Dr. Benjamin Franklin," he said, turning towards the door with myself in tow and, as usual, in the dark.

The haste with which Cork moved bespoke the pent-up energy that had been building within him the past fortnight. He no sooner had left the death chamber when he entered our rooms, slipped into a coat, and was off down the stairwell to the common rooms below. He paused to send Josh, the boy of all work, to tell Tyngs to have the calash ready.

The calash, driven by its owner, Falcor Tyngs, is one of the many luxuries Cork allows himself in Philadelphia. It galls me to pay out good monies for the carriage, horse, and driver when we rarely use them, but the Captain insists. Within minutes all was ready and we were away.

"If you don't mind my asking," I said as we clattered over the scorching cobbles into Broad Street, "why all this rush to Dr. Franklin's?"

"We have here a perplexity of no mean proportions, Oaks." He leaned back into the breeze that our locomotion created. "Consider the facts at hand. A workman disguised as a gentleman is poisoned. In his possession are curious strips of paper. Who, then, is the best paper expert in Philadelphia to confront them with than Poor Richard, the master printer himself?"

"You think the paper had some bearing on Custis's death then?"

"Of course. Put all the points together. How did this poor devil

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die? By poison, mixed with tea. When was the last time you ate an orange, Oaks? Don't you see?"

"Tea and oranges," I mused aloud. Then it struck me. "He's British. The only oranges are on the Redcoat's tables."

"And tea, too, for that matter. Then there is the sun-parched skin to be considered. West Indies, if I make it right."

"That is reasonable. But the paper? That confounds me."

He reached into his pocket and drew out the seven strips. "Note that they are similar in shape and size. But there the similarities end. The quality of each piece of paper is different. All are of top grade, but different.

"Samples of some kind," I said.

"Yes, that could be, but the oblong shapes suggest another function. Paper samples are usually square or triangular. Paper is too expensive to waste so much on a sample. Well, let us see what Dr. Franklin has to say."

The appointments of the house on Bristol Road mirrored its owner's eclectic taste. Amid the sturdy native furniture were beautifully shaped pieces from Europe, as well as lush draperies and fine oil paintings.

He sat in an armchair of red brocade, his foot resting gingerly on a low stool. Here was a man who had met three kings and had visited with numerous lesser royalty, and yet he chose the brown frock of the Quakers as his garb. His grey hair was cut to the length of his collar, and his face was remarkably unlined for a man of 70. He looked up from a sheaf of documents in his lap as we entered, his blue-grey eyes peeping over his eyeglasses.

"Forgive me for remaining seated, gentlemen. The gout again, my dear Jeremy," he said, offering some port from the table beside him. I was surprised to hear Dr. Franklin call the Captain "Jeremy." Few people ever do.

After Cork had explained the Custis affair, he turned over the paper strips, and the venerable doctor examined them closely.

"You are right about all the pieces being of good quality, Jeremy," he said, holding them up to the light.

"Three of them have a portion of a watermark, Doctor."

"Yes, I see that. Now this one with the cloverleaf is from the Rittenhouse Shop here in Philadelphia. And if I read the bead and chain lines correctly in this one, it is from DeWees's Shop in Virginia. I have sold Gerald DeWees rags in the past for use in his papermaking process.

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"Excellent," Cork said, picking one of the strips. "The watermark here appears to be a C and an L, which I immediately recognized as the product of Chris Leffingwell of Connecticut. Now we have something more to go on. Three different papers from three different colonies, and if I guess right, the remaining four are from still other colonies."

"Jeremy," the doctor laughed, "you will have to erase the word 'colony' from your speech, my boy."

Cork dropped the paper strip he was holding. "Then it's done," he said, the surprise showing in his voice.

"This very afternoon. The Declaration of Independence was approved by the Congress, so you will have to start calling these colonies states."

"But I've had no word of it. Do you have a copy?"

"The document is at Dunlap's, the printer. Our courier took it there this afternoon. Copies will be struck off and carried by post-riders to all the states to-night."

I sank back into my chair. So it was done. These shores were now independent and vulnerable.

"Well, well," Cork beamed, "that is good news, but I'm afraid it will do Mr. Custis no good. Have you any notions about this, Dr. Franklin?"

The old man heaved a sigh. "Jeremy, I would like to be of more assistance, but at the moment I am heavily involved in Congressional work. I have to find factories for flint and gun production, and there's food to be raised for the army. I'm afraid I haven't time to spend on trifles."

I truly felt sorry for Cork. The word "trifles" went through him like a rusty blade. But I could sympathise with Franklin, an aged, overburdened man being pestered with a minor crime. Yet he was sensitive enough to see that he had hurt the Captain.

"Trifle was a poor choice of word, Jeremy. A person's death is no trifle. You'll have to forgive me. I am a bit out of sorts to-day. My gout is acting up, my son has decided to remain with the Royalists, and some scoundrel has slain my dog."

"Slain?" Cork asked. "I thought it was merely lost?"

"And so it seemed when I placed a notice for his return, but the old fellow was found just two hours ago out in the brush with its throat cut."

"Perhaps he attacked someone," I suggested. "In this heat, dogs often become angry at the slightest agitation."

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"The cur, like his master, was old and beyond agitation, Mr. Oaks. No, it was an act of malice—probably by a Tory seeking some petty revenge against me. I fear this division between Tory and Whig will be a greater problem than General Howe's army. Perhaps the Declaration of Separation will change some minds. Ah!" he said to a visitor who had just been shown into the room, "here's its author now."

The caller was strikingly handsome and straight as a gun barrel. He was over six-foot-three and in his mid-thirties. Despite the heat of the day, his high forehead was dry, his reddish brown hair unrumpled.

"After eighty-six changes by others, I could hardly call it original authorship," the man said. He was introduced as Thomas Jefferson.

"I warned you that is the hazard of preparing a document that must be approved by a body of men. It is a risk I have always avoided," Dr. Franklin said impishly, but Jefferson didn't appreciate the jest.

Cork must have felt we were intruding, and got ready to leave, when Dr. Franklin stopped him.

"You might explain your problem to Tom while you're here, Jeremy. He enjoys solving problems as much as you do."

Cork obliged and gave him all the details, as well as the paper strips.

"So," Jefferson said after examining the strips, "you believe these samples are from seven different places, yet they are all exactly the same length and width. The measurements intrigue me. Have you a measuring stick about, Ben?"

One was forthcoming and Jefferson measured the pieces of paper with great care.

"Twelve and three-quarters by one-quarter." The Virginian stroked his jaw. "Ben, you are familiar with such matters. What is the usual size of a paper mould?"

"These strips are from American wooden moulds. You can tell by the deckle. They are usually, if not always, twelve and three-quarter-inches by sixteen and three-eighths inches."

"So these were trimmed from the lengths of single sheets. But why always in quarter-inch widths?" Cork asked.

"Trimmed—that's your answer, Jeremy," Dr. Franklin said with a wince as he moved his painful foot. "The quarter-inch width is a trimming, and if the trimming is the same in seven different

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parts of the country, it has to be a universal item."

"Like shinbucks! Money!" Cork cried, getting to his feet. "Now it all makes sense. Our Mr. Custis has somehow obtained samples of bank-note stock used in the printing of money in seven colonies—I mean, states. He was English, or pro-English, which means only one thing."

"A counterfeit scheme, of course," I said.

"To be sure, Oaks," Cork said, turning to Franklin. "With the proper stock and copper plates, the British could flood the land with worthless money, further compounding our troubles."

"Jeremy," Dr. Franklin smiled, "you have my deepest apology for calling this case a trifle."

"Think nothing of it. If it weren't for an alert medical officer, the plot would have worked. We will have to find out who this mysterious Mr. Custis really is, and how he planned to execute his foul deed."

Dr. Franklin got to his feet with another wince of pain and leaned gingerly on his cane. "I leave Custis to you, Jeremy. I have a more urgent task. Tom, we must send a message to Hancock to convene the Congress in emergency session. Details will have to be forwarded to all the state committees for safety and a countermine developed to block the British plot. If we work through the night, we can use the same post-riders who carry the Declaration."

The place was astir like a toppled nest of yellowjackets, with servants being called, notes being written and dispatched. Having no place in it, Cork motioned me with his head and we left.

"Captain, you have my congratulations," I said, as the carriage headed back to the city. "You not only have uncovered a plot, but you have protected your own estate. You realise how much of your cash is in Continental bank-notes?"

He grunted and took on his brooding again.

"Good Lord, man," I said. "You are not offended because you weren't invited to the emergency meeting, are you? As I understand it, they are held in secret session."

"No, I doubt that I could do much there, Oaks," he said. "What does concern me is our new country's naivete in political subterfuge. We are helplessly new at what the Italians call *spione*. It is not in our nature to be deft in the double-deal, but I fear we will have to develop the black arts of Europe quickly and effectively. Well, now to Mr. Custis."

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Dusk had fallen when we alighted at Morby's door to find Dr. Church waiting for us. We repaired to the taproom and took a table. The doctor was still in his Major's militia uniform, and was greatly agitated.

"Captain Cork," he said, looking furtively around the room, "I have a made a very disturbing discovery. For my own curiosity I performed a necropsy on Custis's body after the sheriff had released it. In the victim's gullet I found this."

From his pocket he withdrew a piece of white linen and carefully unfolded it to reveal a small metallic ball about the size of a pea or rifle pellet. He also produced small bits of felt which, he said, he found under Custis's fingernails.

"I didn't notice any neck wound," I said, thinking the doctor was implying that Custis had been shot.

"I don't think that's the doctor's inference, Oaks." Cork rolled the ball in his palm and then smelled it. "It looks like silver, but it could be antimony."

"Aha, so it wasn't arsenic, then," I said. "And it wasn't murder, either. Custis committed suicide by swallowing a poisonous metal ball." I was quite proud of myself, for, though I have been against our involvement in crime, I had been around it long enough to learn something.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Oaks." The doctor gave me a weak, almost painful, smile. "The ball is of silver, which would have no effect on the body chemistry. Death was by arsenic, and it was in the tea. My tests proved that beyond question."

"I see what you are aiming at," Cork said, still playing with the ball. "You found it in the gullet . . ."

The doctor looked embarrassed. "Forgive my rude speech, Captain. My old masters at Edinburgh would be appalled. It was lodged in the esophagus, to be exact, midway in the *pars thoracica* area."

"Gullet will do me fine, Doctor," Cork went on. "Then if he was unconscious within minutes from arsenic, the ball had to be swallowed before his death trance."

"Precisely." The doctor knocked the table with his knuckles for emphasis. "But why would a man, with the clutch of death on him, try to swallow a silver bullet?"

Cork thought for a moment, then said matter-of-factly, "To conceal it, of course."

"Well, I see no rhyme or reason to it." Dr. Church rubbed his

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chin. "Any more than I can understand the bits of felt under his fingernails. At first I thought he might have grabbed at a material made of felt in his death agony, but I re-examined his room just before you returned, and can find nothing made of felt in the place."

"Well done, Doctor. You have proved a first-class investigator. The felt ties it all together, although the silver ball is still a mystery." Cork went on and explained the counterfeiting conspiracy and the significance of the paper samples. "Custis was posing as a coucher in various paper shops throughout the country. A coucher, gentlemen, is the worker who takes the wet sheets of paper from the mould and places them between pieces of felt to absorb the water. What better role could you adopt to gain inside knowledge of which paper was to be used for money printing? A man's occupation often clings to him unnoticed. No, perhaps this little ball will unlock some more information."

"My, oh, my." Dr. Church's eyebrows went up. "Little did I know when I summoned you this morning that I would be involved in a matter of such magnitude. The Congress in secret evening session, a plot abroad in the states—my, oh, my."

"The smallest of us may have to make large contributions, Doctor. Is there a good jeweller in the neighbourhood?"

Church said yes, that a Martin Whitlow kept a shop in the next street.

"Well, Doctor, since he is probably closed for the day, might I rely on your official uniform as a Major of the militia company to fetch him here? Ask him to bring a jeweller's glass, a scale, and the sharpest cutting tool he has."

The doctor left, and Cork pushed his chair back to the wall and stretched out his long legs. For the first time in days he had a relaxed, if not a jubilant, look on his face.

"Well," he said, signalling to Morby, "we might as well enjoy our free moments. Morby, bring some Apple Knock, and send over the thimblerig for a few games."

Thimblerigging is something he never gets to play in our Connecticut homeport, gambling being frowned on there. But in the larger cities he indulges himself, and, I must say, he is rather lucky at it. But, considering the import of the problem at hand, I considered it frivolous to bet on which of the three shells hid the pea.

The thimblerig, a jaunty stout fellow, came up to the table and

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tipped his hat. His wide grin was catlike as he greeted what he assumed to be another pigeon.

"Evening, sirs," he said, spreading out the tools of his trade—a soft cloth, a hard pea, and the three shells. "Name your limit, but I only deal in gold or silver. No paper, thank you."

Cork threw his head back and laughed deeply. "Perhaps our efforts *are* futile, Oaks. Play on for a half-joe, my man."

The pea was placed under the center shell and the thimblerig's hands flew in a whirl, moving the shells in a complex choreography. When he stopped, Cork tapped the center shell, and the gambler looked annoyed. The pea was under it, and Cork collected his coin.

They were in the middle of the sixth game when the doctor-Major returned with an elderly, disgruntled man at his elbow. "I never saw such luck," the thimblerig said in disgust, paying off for the sixth time and leaving us.

"These fellows tickle me," the Captain said, pointing to a chair for the jeweller. "They use their clever hands to misdirect you, but the trick is to keep your eye on the pea. Well, sir, Mr. Whitlow, is it? We seem to have gotten you out of bed."

The old man had dressed hurriedly, and had not combed his hair, which fell over his eyes in a white thatch. "I retire at sunset, as God intended all His creatures to do. This bluejay came slamming at my door like the thunder of hell itself. What's this land coming to, I'd like to know? Toy soldiers disturbing a man's sleep, goods in short supply, and annihilation riding to us in British men-of-war. I tell you, sir, we are being cajoled by madmen—"

Cork cut off his tirade with an upraised hand. "We will take only a few minutes of your time, Mr. Whitlow, and then you can return to the safety of your bed. Would you examine this article?"

The jeweller took the silver ball, hefted it in his hand, and looked as if something were wrong. He took a glass instrument from his pocket and studied the ball's surface, then placed the ball on the scale.

"Just as I thought," he grumbled, "it's hollow. Its size doesn't match its weight. If it's a bullet, it's not heavy enough to kill anyone. Good Lord"—a sudden thought occurred to him—"these Continentals aren't going to use silver bullets, are they?"

Cork ignored the question and asked if there were any markings on the surface.

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"Just the seam where it was sealed. It's very good work, no doubt about that."

"Very good," Cork said. "Now can you cut it open very carefully?"

The old man looked deeply insulted and picked up a small blade with a fine sawtooth edge. "Been doing delicate work for over fifty years," he muttered as he cut slowly through the metal. "The hands and the eyes are as good now as they ever were. Here you are. Is that all?"

"Yes, Mr. Whitlow," Cork said, pushing his thimblerig winnings across to the man. "Thank you. And my best to Mrs. Whitlow and your large brood."

The jeweller shot him a quizzical look. "Now how did you know I have many children?"

The Captain smiled and bid him good evening. "It seems that Dr. Franklin's advice about early to bed and early to rise produces more than wealth and wisdom." He chuckled.

"Isn't there something inside this?" the doctor pointed to the now split ball. Stuffed into one of the hemispheres was a white object. Cork probed it delicately with a knife point until it came loose. It was a tiny wad of material which, when unrolled, proved to be a square of the finest silk, of incredible thinness. Cork spread it out on the table and smoothed its surface.

"Why, yes, there is a message of some kind written on it," I said.

Cork read it through twice and then made room at the table for me to read over his shoulder.

> "King H has approved. Plates ready 1 August. Will deliver after word from B. that payment made.
>
> Dor. Q."

I could make no sense of it, and the doctor-Major said, "What is it, Captain?"

"I'm afraid I will have to ask you to refrain from reading this," Cork said, folding the silk material. "I hope you won't be insulted, but this is a highly confidential matter."

"Of course," Church said with a hurt smile, "I am sure that the Congress can vouch for my trustworthiness since I serve as their courier."

He bid us good night and left, and I said to Cork, "You may have hurt this feelings, Captain. After all, he has helped us quite a bit. What's so secret, anyway? Is it a code of some sort?"

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"That's what bothers me most, my boy. It is not a code, as I expected. Fetch me Falcor Tyngs, will you?"

"We are going out again?"

"Not at the moment. I will have to study this a bit further. Send Tyngs to our rooms and then have the ostler prepare two mounts."

When I returned from the stable to our rooms, Cork had finished giving Tyngs instructions of some sort, and sent him off.

"You're acting rather curiously, Captain," I said, sitting down opposite him at the table. He had taken out the silk material and was reading it anew. He knitted his brows for a long minute and then blinked his eyes wide open in surprise. "Of course!" he cried.

"You have decoded it, then."

"I told you it wasn't a code. It is just that I don't keep up with the social notes. Weren't you telling me that John Hancock has a new bride?"

"Yes, a Miss Dorothy Quincy. Quite a piece of frippery, I gather. Wait, Dorothy Quincy, Dor Q. Do you mean that the wife of the president of the Congress wrote that message?"

"The reference to King H would make it appear so. He is called 'King Hancock' by his detractors, is he not?"

"Well," I chuckled, "you can hardly blame people, the way he parades through the streets with all sorts of liveried servants in his train. Could we have intercepted a Congressional message?"

"Hardly, under the circumstances. We suspect the late Mr. Custis of having been a counterfeiter."

"And the message mentions payment for plates," I cried. "Bank-note plates! My God, I can hardly believe it. Hancock is one of the richest men in America. He's reportedly a snob—"

"And a smuggler," Cork added.

"I see your point, Captain. But King George has put a £500 reward on Hancock's head. But then a young new bride can turn a man's direction. Shouldn't we report this?"

"Yes, and as quickly as you can."

"As I can?"

"Oaks, I am depending on you, for I have other matters to attend to. Take this to Dr. Franklin at the State House and tell him all you know."

I started to protest, but he would have none of it, and rushed me to the stable and had me ahorse in minutes. My last objection was met with a slap of Cork's hand on my mount's hindquarters,

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and I found myself flying towards Chestnut Street.

I entered the courtyard and, while dismounting, could hear voices from the centre rooms of the first floor—the Congress was in heated argument. The doorkeeper's lodgings were in the west wing, and when I pounded on his entry, I was greeted by a gentlewoman. My frantic pounding had alarmed her.

"Sir, you scared me out of my wits. I thought the Indians in the upper east wing had finally burned us down."

I looked at her. "Indians?"

"Visitors. They are very careless with fire. What do you want, sir?"

I told her of the urgency of my talking to Dr. Franklin, and she took me to the centre hall, where I repeated my need to the doorkeeper of the Congressional chamber. It took me about ten minutes to persuade him to take my message to Dr. Franklin. I was surprised when Thomas Jefferson, and not the doctor, returned with him.

"Mr. Oaks," he said in an irritated tone, "Dr. Franklin's gout prevents him from coming out. He suggests that you talk to me."

Well, Cork had specifically said Dr. Franklin and no one else, but I took it upon myself to explain how we had come by the message and handed him the silk cloth. He read it slowly, as all lawyers do, and said nothing for several seconds.

"This is either preposterous or else the most dangerous charge ever. Wait here."

Jefferson was gone for quite a while, and I could hear the room within fall silent. Then Jefferson reappeared and beckoned me in.

All eyes were on me as I entered the large chamber. My heart was pounding with anxiety. Why, I asked myself, had Cork left this unpleasant task to me? The delegates' chairs were comfortably arranged in an informal manner, and I noticed the familiar, but not friendly, face of Roger Sherman from Connecticut, a man I admired for he had risen from a shoemaker to a prosperous land dealer. Sherman's glare told me that great gravity had settled over the body of men.

I walked forward towards the double brass-fitted fireplaces that faced the door. They were, of course, unlit, but the unbearable heat of the room made it seem as if they were both ablaze. The closeness of the room was further abetted by the pungent wafting that came through the narrow openings of the window tops from the stable across the street. I turned towards the back wall, where

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there was a panoply consisting of a drum, swords and banners. They were the trophies of the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, a place to which I wished I could be transported that instant.

Below the panoply was the President's desk, with the official mace on it. Behind it sat John Hancock, a look of black anger on his face. I found myself appealing to Jehovah.

"Sir," Hancock's voice roared at me, "you have brought a charge into this chamber that is both absurd and treasonous!"

"Mr. President," a shortish delegate began.

Hancock looked his way, still angry. "The chair recognizes Mr. Samuel Adams of Massachusetts."

"I move that we become a committee of the whole while we hear this man."

Someone seconded the proposal. Hancock called for a voice vote and all said "Aye." Hancock then rose from his chair and stepped down to sit with the other delegates. I have long heard of Samuel Adams's parliamentary ability, and this was a shrewd example of it. By moving for a committee of the whole, he had automatically made anything said unofficial.

"Mr. Oaks," Dr. Franklin said from his chair, "this is most disturbing. Can you give us all the details of the affair?"

My throat was parched as if from sand, my arms wouldn't move. I opened my mouth to speak and found salvation. I heard Cork's voice boom from the doorway.

"Gentlemen," he said, "forgive my intrusion, but I don't think Mr. Oaks's recitation will be necessary. The case has been solved to your advantage, Mr. Hancock."

Well, by jing, there he was, strutting into this august assembly like a peacock, a smile of self-satisfaction on his face. Dr. Franklin asked him to explain, and Cork raised the curtain on the most important performance of his life.

"Good sirs," he said, "and particularly you, Mr. President, have my heartfelt apology for being a jackanapes. Here I have been following false trails when the real problem lay under my nose. A traveller's mysterious death set off a chain of circumstances that led me to a counterfeit plot. And that, ironically, is what it was. A counterfeit, a fake. There was no plot—not against our money, at least. The plot was deeper and infinitely more dangerous."

Every man in the room leaned forward in anticipation.

"Mr. Thompson," Cork said to the secretary of the Congress, "is this the document you sent to Dunlap the printer late this af-

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ternoon?" He handed him a paper and the man looked at it quickly. From my vantage point I could only see that it was in holograph with many corrections on it.

The man looked at it quickly. "Yes," he said, returning it to Cork, "I recognize it as such."

"Good. Now, I give it to Mr. Jefferson, its original author."

Jefferson took the paper and read it with the same slow exactness he had used on the silk material. He looked puzzled and then reached down and took another paper from the lawyer's bag at his feet and compared the two papers.

"Why, the copy sent to the printer has been changed! I have here my own fair copy, which incorporates all the additions and deletions passed on this afternoon. The printer's copy has been altered. Here, where we originally said 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,' this copy deletes 'happiness' and says 'property.' And there are other changes. We took out the mention of slaves to appease the Southern delegation, and here it is back in again. This is dreadful. If printed copies have left for the states—"

"Take your ease, sir," Cork said. "But if that document had gone out to the people, you would have crushed any faith in this Congress, and possibly in the revolution effort as well. Just a few simple changes and a few additions would have pointed up the differences in regional attitudes, and set the northern states against the southern, the townsman against the farmer, the landed against the poor. Thus the document meant to unite would have served to divide. It was a simple thing to do. The copy sent to Dunlap's is indeed a calligraphic mess. Eighty-six changes and deletions. Words crossed over. A few more would not have been noticed."

"But unless it were one of *us*—" Hancock began. "I don't see how any outsider could have done it."

"And why not, Mr. President?" Cork shook a finger. "I would suggest better security measures in the future. There are troops in the State House yard each day. Perhaps not everything can be heard through the window, but the gist of things can be. Besides, our culprit didn't need to eavesdrop. He had seen the document after Mr. Jefferson wrote it."

"Why, no one saw it prior to submission but John Adams, Dr. Franklin, and myself," Jefferson said.

"Precisely. Did you leave it with them?"

"With Dr. Franklin, yes."

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"And Dr. Franklin's dog was destroyed and the body hidden. Doesn't that suggest that someone broke into the house on Bristol Road, silenced the dog so his entry would not be discovered, and then read the document?"

"But why all this nonsense about counterfeiting," Dr. Franklin grumbled, "and this secret-message business?"

"The first was to create a crisis, which would bring you into session on the night the Declaration of Independence was to be dispatched. The second was to make sure you stayed in session until the post-riders had left. The next time you use your courier to take things to a printer, don't trust him simply because he is a medical man and a Major in the Associators."

It was after midnight when we reached Morby's and, as usual after a triumph, Cork was famished. Despite the late hour, the hearths were relit and a feast was in preparation. Cork eschewed fish since it had been his main diet, and ordered roast kid, ducklings in bing sauce, and a huge bowl of broccola laced with lemon butter.

"How did you get on to Dr. Church?" I asked him as we ate our snapper stew. "He certainly was convincing."

"Not really," he said. "Just up to a point. When he conveniently gave us the silver bullet with the message inside, I became suspicious. You will recall I was annoyed that it wasn't in code. Why would anyone go to such trouble to conceal a message and then write it out in plain language? That is bad *spione*."

"Then why didn't he encode it?"

"Because he could not be sure that I would be able to decode it in time to warn the Congress. But his telling us that he had found felt under Custis's fingernails was sheer poppycock. He wanted to strengthen the evidence that Custis had worked as a coucher in paper shops. A coucher works with his hands in water all day, and certainly would not have the callused and tanned hands that our corpse did."

"And what of Custis? Who was he?"

"We'll never know. Probably a seaman whom Dr. Church had duped into playing the role of a traveller. A little poison in his tea, and he became the perfect player."

"But, Captain, how could this lead you to the Declaration plot?"

"I had Tyngs check on Church, and he found that Church had been away from the city on trips at frequent intervals. Once my

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suspicions were aroused, I asked myself why he was doing this. It came to me when I thought of the thimblerig. Of course he was doing one thing to cover another, and the Declaration was the most important thing in Philadelphia this day. I went to Dunlap's and learned that it was Church, as an official courier, who had delivered the document from the State House, and there you have it."

We were just slicing into the ducklings when John Hancock entered the room with Mr. Jefferson and a third man.

"May I present Mr. John Jay," Hancock said. We shook hands and they sat down.

"Captain Cork," Mr. Jay said, "we were all very impressed by your ingenuity in solving this problem, and the Congress would not like to lose such a talent. At the moment I am in charge of covert activities against the enemy, but I would like you to take over my operational branch."

Well, that explained it. Now I knew why I was sent to the State House to give Dr. Franklin the silk cloth and bear John Hancock's ire. Captain Cork's gall is unspeakably enormous. Having detected the plot, he could have quickly reported it—but not Cork. He had to involve the entire Congress in his victory. And this new appointment told me he had worked a smart bit of thimblerig himself.

Later that night in our rooms I noticed that Cork had kept the copy of the Declaration that Dr. Church had changed.

"Isn't that the property of the government?"

"A gift from Mr. Hancock," he said.

Well, at least for once, we received something for our services, even if it was only a scrap of paper.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The original Declaration that was sent to Dunlap's was, in reality, lost and never recovered. The document on view in Washington, D.C. is an engrossed copy on parchment, which was signed by the members of Congress on August 2, 1776. There were no signatures on the Dunlap copy.

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NEW –

a Centennial story by
EDWARD D. HOCH

The preceding story took place in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. Now we transport you exactly 100 years—to July 4, 1876, and to Washington, D.C., near the end of President Grant's second term. And once again grave events surrounded the country's celebration—this time on the Centennial of its birth . . .

THE CENTENNIAL ASSASSIN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

General Custer and 264 of his men had died at the Little Big Horn on Sunday. Now it was the following Saturday, and an air of gloom hung over Rodney Young's office in the White House. Usually he tried to leave early on Saturdays during the summer, looking forward to an afternoon of riding in the country, but this day there was no escaping the duties of office.

"A terrible thing to happen so close to the Centennial celebration," he remarked to President Grant's private secretary, Leroy E. Cherage, who lounged in one of the big overstuffed chairs.

"Can't the army do anything about Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse?" Cherage asked without changing his position. He was a young man of French descent, one of a handful who had been brought in recently to replace the discredited former secretary, General Babcock. In an administration riddled with corruption that reached to the Cabinet itself, the collusion of General Babcock had been a personal embarrassment to the President. Thus his replacement with young men like Cherage, who offered no threat to anyone.

But Rodney Young personally found it difficult to work with them. His duties at the White House, as a glorified appointments secretary, were vague enough at best. Dealing with the likes of Cherage and others was almost more than he could manage. "I

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am certain the army will do what it can," he said, answering the young man's question. "But obviously not in time for Tuesday's Centennial."

Leroy Cherage pressed his lips together. "Has word of the massacre reached the press as yet?"

"I fear it's only a matter of time. When the scouts reach Helena, in the Montana Territory, word will be telegraphed to Salt Lake City and then east. It's a wonder the army managed to notify us first—but then it still took six days." He played with an ink bottle on his desk, trying to form some plan of action. He hated this blot on the Centennial festivities.

Rodney stood up suddenly. "I must see the President," he said with decision.

"At this hour? You know he is working on his memoirs."

"Yes," Rodney agreed, with a trace of annoyance in his voice. Even the impeachment and resignation of Secretary of War Belknap a few months earlier had not made an impact on Grant. At times it seemed he was more interested in reliving his wartime triumphs than in dealing with corruption and Indian attacks and the nation's 100th birthday. "Yes," he repeated. "But I'm going in to see him anyway."

He crossed the waiting room and entered the President's second-floor office adjoining the Cabinet room. Ulysses S. Grant looked up with a trace of annoyance. "What is it, Rodney? Can't you see I'm busy?" The odor of cigar smoke was heavy in the room.

"It's about the Custer affair, Mr. President."

Grant shot a glance at the door that led to the private telegraph room adjoining his office. It had been there since Lincoln's time, and that was how the word of Custer's tragedy had reached the White House. "What about it? I've already ordered the army to take appropriate measures."

Rodney cleared his throat. "The word of the massacre hasn't yet reached the public, sir. I was wondering if it might be delayed until Wednesday—until the day following the Centennial celebration."

"How could we do that?"

"As I understand it, sir, the word is being carried by scouts to Helena. They're in army employ, and a telegraph message to one of the forts along the route could delay them for a matter of days."

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"Do we have telegraph communictions with forts in that area?"

Rodney pointed to the big map on the north wall of the office. "Here, Mr. President, at this settlement. Our message could intercept the riders there when they stop to change horses. I only ask for a few days' time, so as not to distress the nation in its moment of glory."

President Grant scratched his beard and considered the request. "Very well," he decided. "Do what you can to delay the news. It can do no harm to those poor fellows now."

"Thank you, sir." Rodney prepared to leave, then decided to press his luck on another bothersome point. "About the Centennial, Mr. President—have you decided on your schedule for Tuesday as yet?"

Grant snorted. "I'll not ride the train to Philadelphia, if that's what you're asking."

"You've been invited to address the Centennial Exhibition—"

"I was there for opening day in May, and that's enough! Philadelphia is too damn hot in July. For that matter, Washington is also too damn hot in July."

"Surely you should do something to commemorate the day."

"I issued a proclamation suggesting public religious services, didn't I? Let the people go to church in the morning and watch fireworks in the evening. They don't want speeches from me." His voice took on a tone approaching bitterness. "They don't want anything but to get me out of here and put Hayes or Tilden in my place."

"You've served nearly two terms, sir," Rodney reminded him. "And with the scandals—"

"I know, I know. But don't ask me to go to Philadelphia." It was almost a plea.

"Very well, Mr. President." Rodney Young withdrew and closed the door. It was still four months to the election, and even longer before Grant's term officially ended. Rodney wondered if he'd be able to cope that long.

After sending off a coded telegraph message to the post commander in the Montana Territory, Rodney had just pulled down the cover of his rolltop desk when George Peters poked his head in from the clerk's office to announce a visitor. "A young woman, sir. Miss Elizabeth Blazer."

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"Elizabeth! Send her in, by all means." He could imagine no one else whose arrival would have delayed his afternoon in the country. But for Elizabeth Blazer he could wait.

She was a slim, attractive young woman with dark hair and pale skin and she swept into his office as if arriving to take command of a regiment. He had never known a woman quite so alive and sure of herself as Elizabeth Blazer, and the very sight of her stirred something deep within him.

"How are you, Elizabeth?" he greeted her, rising to take her hand.

"I'm well, Rod." She was the only one who ever called him that. "The White House seems a busy place for a Saturday."

"We're preparing for Tuesday," he replied, stretching the truth a bit. Elizabeth was deeply involved in Centennial activities, working with the city of Philadelphia on its Exhibition. The White House's participation—or lack of it—was a sore spot between them.

"Do you mean President Grant has had a change of heart about speaking at the Centennial?" she asked.

"Not exactly. But we're busy on other aspects."

She seated herself in a chair opposite his desk, pulling up her long skirts to expose a glimpse of ankle. "Actually, I'm not here to badger you about that today, Rod. I have news for you that might be terribly urgent."

"What is it?"

"A woman came to me in Philadelphia with a story that President Grant's life is in danger."

"There are always such stories," he assured her. "Ever since Lincoln the people seem to dwell on the possibilities of assassination."

"She says he's to be killed before Tuesday—on the eve of the Centennial celebration."

"There's no great danger of that," Rodney confided. "I doubt if he plans to stir out of the White House over the weekend, except possibly for church services."

"Those Methodists are like that," she said with an irreverent smile. "All the same, I think you should see this woman, Rod."

"See her?"

"I brought her with me to Washington."

"You take her story that seriously?"

"I remember Mr. Lincoln. President Grant is no Lincoln, but I

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don't want it to happen again." She shifted in her chair. "As I understand it, there is still no government agency charged with safeguarding the President's life."

"Congress doesn't seem to think one is needed. The Lincoln assassination was an aberration, the final gasp of that terrible war. It wouldn't happen again in a hundred years."

"You believe that, Rod? You believe there is no one in this country who would like Grant dead and the nation in disarray as the Centennial approaches?"

"All right, perhaps I don't believe it. What should we do? The only police agency the Federal government has is the Secret Service, and their job is to deal with the flood of counterfeit money we've had since the war. They're hardly equipped to guard the President."

"Will you come listen to this woman's story, Rod?" Elizabeth pleaded. "She's waiting at my hotel."

He could see there was no escaping it. "I'll come. I have faith in your judgment."

She smiled slightly and rose from her chair. "Then let us go to meet Mrs. Ready."

They were staying at Willard's Hotel on Fourteenth Street, which had been the city's most popular meeting place since before the war. Even now, on a Saturday afternoon, Rodney could hear the clamor of masculine voices from the bar off the lobby, and a haze of blue cigar smoke hung thick within.

But Elizabeth led him past the bar, where no woman ventured, and up the main staircase to the rooms above. Mrs. Ready was waiting there to receive them, and the first sight of her was a shock. Though her age might have been under 60, her hands trembled with the feebleness of a much older woman. She needed a cane to stand and greet him, and he hastened to urge she be seated. Her eyes too, full of anxious uncertainty, reflected a troubled mind that had long ago seen its best days.

"Elizabeth told me of your warning, Mrs. Ready," Rodney said, seating himself gingerly on the edge of a chair opposite her. "It was noble of you to make the tiring trip from Philadelphia."

"I so fear for the President's life," she said in a voice stronger than he'd expected. "I must see him to warn him."

"I'm afraid a personal appointment would be impossible, because of the press of official business. You must understand. But I will certainly see that your message is delivered directly to him."

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She seemed unsatisfied, but after a moment's hesitation she agreed. "Very well. Perhaps after you hear my story you will change your mind as to the seriousness of the threat."

"We are always concerned for the President's safety," he told her. "Just who do you think is going to kill him?"

"My son," she replied quietly.

"Your—"

"Did Elizabeth tell you who I am?"

"Only that your name is Mrs. Ready."

"Sarah Ready. But the *Mrs.* is only a convenience. I have never been married." She paused, trying to control the tremor in her right hand. "I was employed for a time by the late Horace Greeley."

"He was a great newspaperman."

"He supported your General Grant in the early years of his presidency, but the corruption became too much for poor Horace to accept. That is why he ran against Grant on the Liberal Republican and Democratic tickets in '72. You know what happened. The pressures of the campaign drove poor Horace to madness and death less than a month after the voting."

"You can't blame President Grant for that," Rodney said. "He had nothing but the deepest regard for Greeley."

She waved away his remark. "Be that as it may, there is one person who believes Grant caused poor Horace's terrible death. That person intends to have his revenge by assassinating the President."

"Your son?"

She nodded. "My son. Franklin Ready."

"Just why does he feel so strongly about it?"

She took a deep breath. "Franklin believes himself to be Horace Greeley's illegitimate son."

"You said—"

Sarah Ready hurried on. "You don't know what it is to bring up a boy without a father, without ever having had a proper husband. He was always questioning me, wanting to know *who*! I couldn't say that his father was a Greek sailor I'd met one night in New York. So finally one day I told him it was Horace. I told him I had been Horace Greeley's mistress."

"And he believed you?"

"Yes. I'd taken him to the *Tribune* office to meet Horace once, and naturally he made a fuss over Franklin. The boy remembered

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that, and when I told him Horace was his father, he was willing to believe it. He *wanted* to believe it."

"How long ago was that?"

"He was sixteen at the time. It was the year the war ended."

"So he'd be twenty-seven now?"

"Yes."

"And where is he?"

"I have no idea. After I left the *Tribune* we moved from New York to Philadelphia, where I could be near my sister. He left home when he was twenty and I haven't seen him since."

"Then why do you fear for Grant's life?"

"After Horace died I received a long rambling letter from my son. In it he made veiled threats against the President's life. Last week I received another letter—much more specific this time. He said he would kill President Grant on the eve on the Centennial celebration, to punish all of America for what it did to his father."

"Couldn't you write and tell him the truth?"

"The letters bore no address, though the latest was mailed from here in Washington. That was why I went to Elizabeth."

"He's twenty-seven," Rodney mused. "And what does he look like?"

"When I last saw him, he was of medium build with dark hair and a close-cropped beard."

"A vague description at best. But we'll be watching for him, Mrs. Ready. If he turns up, we'll try not to harm him."

"I would like to give my warning personally to the President."

"As I said, that's impossible."

She studied him for a few moments, then turned away . "Very well."

"When will you be returning to Philadelphia?"

"I plan to remain here until after Monday. I want to be here if anything happens to him."

Rodney did not know if she meant her son or President Grant, and he didn't ask. He bowed slightly and left the room.

Elizabeth Blazer caught up with him outside. "Why couldn't the President see her? What would be the harm?"

"We have only her word that this son exists. She showed us no letter. Perhaps she is the only danger Grant faces."

"Do you believe that?"

"It's almost as easy to believe as a mad avenger who believes himself to be the illegitimate son of Horace Greeley."

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"Then you'll do nothing?"

"On the contrary," Rodney assured her. "I'll do everything I can to safeguard the President, starting with a journey to Baltimore tonight."

On Sunday morning after church services he sought out President Grant in the oval library upstairs in the White House. Grant took the cigar from his mouth and said, "Well, Rodney. No riding this weekend?"

"I've been busy with other matters, sir."

"Young chap like you should marry and settle down."

"Mr. President—"

"Something on your mind? Here, let me pour us a little whiskey."

"It's a bit early in the day for me, sir."

"Is it?" He put down the half-empty decanter. "All right, out with it. What's bothering you?"

Rodney quickly told him of the meeting with Mrs. Ready. When he'd finished, Grant leaned back in his chair and said, "Obviously the woman is deranged."

"I agree that may be the case, but precautions should be taken nevertheless."

"Precautions? What sort of precautions?"

"If you'll pardon me, Mr. President—I spent last evening in Baltimore. I rode the train over and saw a man named Felix Woodward. Have you ever heard the name?"

Grant thought about it. "There was a Woodward under my command during the war—"

"No, this is a different one. I'd heard talk of him, but had never seen him before. His claim to fame is that he looks a great deal like you. Of course he wears his beard in the same manner to heighten the resemblance."

Grant snorted. "Many men look like me! With these chin whiskers who can tell us apart?"

Rodney hurried on. "What I want to do, sir, is to install Felix Woodward in the White House, just for tomorrow. Then if there is an assassination attempt—"

Grant's fist hit the table. "No! By God, Rodney, I won't have a double! If the Lord says it's my time to go, I'll be waiting. I never asked a man to shield me from Confederate guns, and I won't start now. You keep your Felix Woodward and I'll still be here to

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drink a little whiskey with you on the Fourth of July."

"I'm sure you will, sir. I only meant—"

"Why should poor Woodward endanger his life for me?"

"He has no family, sir. And he's suffering from an incurable disease."

But Grant was firm. "No, no! No double!"

"You understand the nation's position, sir? We've been without a vice-president since Wilson's death last year. If anything happens to you, there'd only be an acting president—the president *pro tempore* of the Senate. That, coupled with the Custer tragedy, might be more than the nation could bear."

"You underestimate the American people," Grant grumbled. "Others have made that mistake in the past."

Rodney could see it was hopeless. "Woodward is here in Washington, sir—just in the event you change your mind."

"There will be no assassination attempt. Horace Greeley's ghost doesn't frighten me." Grant turned away, ending the interview.

Rodney went across the hall to his own little office and sat for a time staring out the window at the green of the White House lawn. Finally he opened the drawer of a wooden filing cabinet and removed a Model 1873 cavalry pistol he kept there. As he loaded it, he wondered if it was the type that General Custer had carried.

Rodney was at his desk early Monday morning, while Cherage and the other secretaries were trying out samples of the new instant coffee in the clerk's office. He liked the clerk, Peters, more than the others, but he had no time to linger over such frivolities this morning. The gun was ready in the top drawer of his desk as he glanced over the President's meager appointments list for July 3rd.

One that immediately struck his eye was an interview with a reporter from the Washington *Evening Star*. Arranged months earlier, it had completely escaped his mind until this moment. If the man was on schedule, he should be in the waiting room now.

Rodney walked across his office and opened the waiting-room door. The newspaper reporter was there, deep in conversation with Elizabeth Blazer. "I'm sorry to interrupt. You're from the *Evening Star*?"

The young clean-shaven man smiled. "That's right, sir. Thomas Gates, at your service."

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Behind the reporter's back, Elizabeth was signaling him. He thought he knew why. "I have some bad news, Mr. Gates. It's impossible for the President to see you today."

"But the interview was arranged months ago!"

"Nevertheless—"

Then, as bad luck would have it, the door to the inner office opened and the President appeared. The young man jumped to his feet. "President Grant, I'm Gates of the *Evening Star,* here for the interview."

"Come in, then. I can only give you a few minutes."

Thomas Gates strode triumphantly into the President's office, leaving Rodney alone with Elizabeth Blazer. "You think he might be the assassin?" he asked her.

"He fits the general description of Mrs. Ready's son."

Rodney slipped the pistol from his desk drawer, tucking it into the waistband of his trousers. "I'll have to go in there," he said.

Elizabeth shook her head. "Grant is safe. If Gates was the assassin, he would have struck the first moment he was alone with the President. Why bother with an interview you'll never deliver to your paper?"

"A man believing he was Horace Greeley's son might bother," Rodney reminded her.

He knocked and entered the office. Thomas Gates was making notes in the visitor's chair and all seemed well. Rodney spoke to the President on a minor scheduling matter, then retreated to his own office.

"Didn't I tell you it was all right?" Elizabeth asked.

"It might not have been."

"What about your plan for a double?"

"Grant vetoed it. He said he went through the war without a stand-in, and he doesn't need one now."

"Have you told anyone else about the threat?"

"Not yet, but I may have to." He pulled a piece of notepaper toward him. "I should make a list."

He wrote down the name of Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, one of the few Cabinet members he trusted. Below it he put George Peters, the clerk. And Leroy E. Cherage. Though Rodney disliked the secretary, he would need him if the President was called away from the White House.

The door to the President's office opened and Thomas Gates

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stepped into the waiting room. "I have a deadline to make," he explained, hurrying past them.

Rodney went quickly to the President's door and looked in. "I'm still alive as you can see," the bearded man said, turning from the window. "Aren't you convinced yet that the woman's story is a hoax?"

"No, and I won't be until this day is done," Rodney told him.

"Call in the police or the army if it will make you feel any better."

"I believe I can protect you as well as they can."

"No one can protect me against a truly dedicated assassin." He picked up a book of Civil War history. "See that I'm not disturbed for a few hours, Rodney."

"Yes, Mr. President."

"Don't look so displeased. There is no one in Washington who'll want to see me anyway."

"Congress is in session," Rodney reminded him.

"Yes, yes, Congress." He glanced up. "Do any Congressmen know about General Custer yet?"

"Not to my knowledge. If all goes well, the news won't be made public until Wednesday. It will be on the front page of every newspaper in the country by Thursday morning."

"It's a problem to be faced." He sat down again at the presidential desk, resuming his writing, and Rodney left him alone.

Outside, in the doorway of his office, Elizabeth Blazer was waiting. "The President is all right?"

"Yes, he's all right." His mind turned to Mrs. Ready. "Do you think the old lady's still at her hotel?"

"Either there or searching the streets for her missing son."

"If there is a missing son." He sat down at the desk and added the name of Horace Greeley, with quotation marks around it, to the list he'd been making. "You know, I liked the idea of it being that reporter, Gates. Isn't it possible that Mrs. Ready's son, maddened by the wrong done his supposed father, might actually imagine himself to *be* Horace Greeley? In that case, the most likely place to find him would be on a newspaper."

"You could be a detective, Rod—one of those Pinkerton men."

Rodney started to reply when Cherage and another man came in through the clerk's office. "This is Mr. Simmons," the secretary said, "First Selectman of Berry Falls, Ohio. He's bringing a Centennial gift to President Grant."

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Rodney scanned the appointment book. "I have no such name listed."

"I'm sure President Grant would want to see someone from his home state."

Simmons was an older, bearded man, and it hardly seemed likely he could be the assassin. He spoke with a gruff voice as he explained the reason for his visit. "This piece of wood is from a hundred-year-old oak tree in our great state of Ohio. You'll notice President Grant's name and the Centennial date have been carved onto it. I'm certain he'll want to have it."

Rodney thought he heard Elizabeth's sniff of disdain, but he didn't dare look. He excused himself and went to the door of the President's office. "Pardon me, Mr. President, but there's a special visitor from your home state."

The President stirred behind his desk and put down his pen. "Well, I suppose I must see him if he's from Ohio. Send him in."

Rodney motioned Simmons and Cherage into the office and went back across the waiting room to his own cubicle. "What about that Woodward?" Elizabeth asked. "Are you going to send him back to Baltimore?"

"He's already gone," Rodney said. "On the morning train." He was gazing at the paper where he'd written the list of names.

The door to President Grant's office opened after a few moments and Simmons emerged alone. "So pleased to meet you, sir," he said over his shoulder.

The President mumbled a reply as the politician from Ohio departed. Rodney glanced through the partly open office door and saw Leroy Cherage settling into the chair opposite the President's desk.

"I'd better be going," Elizabeth said.

Rodney glanced down at the paper again.

"*Horace Greeley.*"

He read over the list of names he'd written.

Hamilton Fish.

George Peters.

Leroy E. Cherage.

"Horace Greeley."

His vision blurred for an instant and then cleared. It didn't make any sense, but there it was. "Come look at this," he said to Elizabeth. "I've just noticed the damnedest thing."

"What's that?"

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He pointed to the names. "Look here."

Leroy E. Cherage.

"Horace Greeley."

"Why, they're—"

"Anagrams! Mrs. Ready's son has been here in the White House all the time!"

He was reaching for his pistol when they heard the single shot from the President's office.

Rodney dashed across the waiting room and into the office. Leroy Cherage turned from the desk as he entered, revealing the slumped body in the President's chair. "You're too late!" Cherage said, with something like madness in his voice. "I've killed him! I've killed President Grant!"

The double-barreled derringer in his right hand was starting to rise again when, without thinking, Rodney shot him between the eyes.

At a few minutes after nine that evening President Ulysses S. Grant entered his White House office for the first time that day. Only Rodney and Elizabeth were present, and they stood up as he came in.

"I suppose you're to be congratulated, Rodney," the President said. "You were right about the attempt to assassinate me."

"I'm afraid it's no consolation to be right, sir, with Felix Woodward lying dead."

"You did your best, Rodney."

"If only I'd have seen that anagram a minute sooner!"

"The shock was even greater for me," Elizabeth Blazer confided to Grant. "I thought Cherage had killed you."

Grant glanced at Rodney. "Didn't even tell the girl, eh?"

"There was a possibility," Rodney said with some embarrassment, "that Elizabeth and Mrs. Ready were in the plot together. Elizabeth might have been the assassin." He felt himself blush and hurried on. "I didn't believe it for an instant, but I couldn't take the chance of telling her about the substitution."

"But—" Elizabeth looked from one to the other. "Then it wasn't true you refused to have a double, Mr. President?"

Grant snorted. "Of course I refused! Got talked into it by Julia, my wife! God, there were times when she shared a tent with me during the war—I had to listen to her now!"

"It's a good thing for the country that you did," Rodney said.

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"What about Woodward's body—and Cherage's?"

"Woodward will be returned to Baltimore for burial. Cherage will go into an unmarked grave. I think it best, sir, if no one knows what happened here today—and that includes Mrs. Ready. It might give other people ideas."

Grant waved a hand. "Whatever you say, Rodney. I'm in your hands in this matter."

"I've already made arrangements, sir."

"Good!" He started for the door. "I'll be down the hall with Julia. Please join us."

When they were alone, Elizabeth said, "I'm glad you didn't tell me, Rod. When I think of that poor man, dying in Grant's place—"

"It was something he could do for his country," Rodney said.

"When I explained the problem, and the risks, and told him about General Custer, he was eager to do whatever he could. I don't think he had many months left anyway."

"If only we could have told Cherage the truth—that he wasn't Horace Greeley's son at all!"

"For someone like that it might not have made any difference. We couldn't risk it."

Elizabeth walked to the window. "Look, the celebration is starting early! There are fireworks over the Potomac."

He took her by the hand. "Let's go down the hall and watch them with the President and Mrs. Grant."

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NEW —

a Tercentennial story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Having decided to offer you in this issue not only a story that might have taken place on July 4, 1776, the day our country was born, and a Centennial story of events that might have happened on July 4, 1876, it occurred to us: what might our Tercentennial celebration bring forth? What might come to pass on July 4th in the year 2076? The thought became father of the deed when we asked Isaac Asimov to peer into the future—always a dangerous enterprise; but Mr. Asimov was bold enough and brave enough to accept the challenge.

So now we take you 100 years into the future—to that fateful July 4th when President Hugo Allen Winkler was scheduled to make his Tercentennial speech about the awesome problems and difficulties facing the World Federation in 2076 . . .

THE TERCENTENARY INCIDENT

by ISAAC ASIMOV

July 4, 2076—and for the third time the accident of the conventional system of numeration, based on powers of ten, had brought the last two digits of the year back to the fateful 76 that had seen the birth of the nation.

It was no longer a nation in the old sense; it was rather a geographic expression, part of a greater whole that made up the Federation of all of humanity on Earth, together with its offshoots on the Moon and in the space colonies. By culture and heritage, however, the name and the *idea* lived on, and that portion of the planet signified by the old name was still the most prosperous and advanced region of the world. —And the President of the United States was still the most powerful single figure in the Planetary Council . . .

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From a height of 200 feet, Lawrence Edwards watched the small figure of the President of the United States. Edwards drifted lazily above the crowd, his flotron motor making a barely heard chuckle on his back; and what he saw looked exactly like what anyone would see on a holovision screen. How many times had he seen little figures like that in his living room, little figures in a cube of sunlight, looking as real as though they were living homunculi, except that you could put your hand through them.

But you couldn't put your hand through the tens of thousands of people spreading out over the open spaces surrounding the Washington Monument. And you couldn't put your hand through the President. You could reach out to him, touch him, shake his hand.

Edwards thought sardonically of the uselessness of that added element of tangibility and wished himself a hundred miles away, floating in air over some isolated wilderness, instead of here where he had to watch for any sign of disorder. There wouldn't be any necessity for his being here but for the mythology of the value of "pressing the flesh."

Edwards was not an admirer of the President—Hugo Allen Winkler, 57th of the line.

To Edwards, President Winkler seemed an empty man, a charmer, a vote grabber, a promiser. He was a disappointing man to have in office now after all the hopes in those first months of his administration. The World Federation was in danger of breaking up long before its goal had been achieved and Winkler did nothing about it. One needed a strong hand now, not a glad hand; a heard voice, not a honeyed voice.

There was the President now, shaking hands—a space forced around him by the Service, with Edwards and a few others of the Service watching intently from above.

The President would be running for re-election certainly, and there seemed a good chance he might be defeated. That would just make things worse, since the opposition party was dedicated to the destruction of the Federation.

Edwards sighed. It would be a miserable four years coming up—maybe a miserable 40—and all he could do was float in the air, ready to reach every Service agent on the ground by laserphone if there was the slightest—

He didn't see the slightest. There was no sign of disturbance.

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Just a little puff of white dust, hardly visible; just a momentary glitter in the sunlight, up and away, gone as soon as Edwards became aware of it.

Where was the President? Edwards had lost sight of him in the dust.

He looked about in the vicinity of where he had seen him last. The President could not have moved far.

Then he did become aware of disturbance. First it was among the Service agents themselves who seemed to have gone off their heads and to be moving this way and that jerkily. Then those among the crowd near them caught the contagion and then those farther off.

The noise rose and became a thunder.

Edwards didn't have to hear the words that made up the rising roar. It seemed to carry the news to him by nothing more than its mass clamorous urgency. President Winkler had disappeared! He had been there one moment and had turned into a handful of vanishing dust the next.

Edwards held his breath in an agony of waiting during what seemed a drug-ridden eternity, waiting for the long moment of realization to end and for the mob to break into a mad, rioting stampede.

—When a resonant voice sounded over the gathering din, and at its sound the noise faded, died, and became a silence. It was as though it were all a holovision program after all and someone had simply turned the sound down and out.

Edwards thought, It's the President.

There was no mistaking the voice. Winkler stood on the guarded stage from which he was to give his Tercentenary speech, and from which he had left only ten minutes ago to shake hands with some in the crowd.

How had he got back there?

Edwards listened—

"Nothing has happened to me, my fellow Americans. What you have seen just now was merely the breakdown of a mechanical device. It was not your President who disappeared, so let us not allow a mechanical failure to dampen the celebration of the happiest day the world has yet seen. —My fellow Americans, give me your attention—"

And what followed was the Tercentenary speech, the greatest speech Winkler had ever made, or Edwards had ever heard. Ed-

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wards found himself forgetting his supervisory job in his eagerness to listen.

Winkler had it right! He understood the tremendous importance of saving the Federation and he was getting his message across to the people.

Deep inside, though, another part of Edwards was remembering the persistent rumors that the new expertise in robotics had resulted in the construction of a look-alike President, a robot who could perform the purely ceremonial functions, who could shake hands with the crowd, who could be neither bored nor exhausted—nor assassinated.

Edwards thought, in obscure shock, that must have been what happened. There had been such a look-alike robot down there shaking hands, and in a way the robot had been assassinated.

October 13, 2077—

Edwards looked up as the waist-high robot guide approached and said mellifluously, "Mr. Janek will see you now."

Edwards stood up, feeling tall as he towered above the stubby, metallic guide. He did not feel young, however. His face had gathered lines in the last year and he was aware of them.

He followed the guide into a surprisingly small room where, behind a surprisingly small desk, sat Francis Janek, a slightly paunchy and incongruously young-looking man.

Janek smiled and his eyes were friendly as he rose to shake hands. "Mr. Edwards."

Edwards muttered, "I'm glad to have the opportunity, sir—"

Edwards had never seen Janek before, but then the job of personal secretary to the President was a quiet one and made little news.

Janek said, "Sit down. Would you care for a soya-stick?"

Edwards smiled a polite negative, and sat down. Janek was clearly emphasizing his youth. His ruffled shirt was open and the hairs on his chest had been dyed a subdued but definite violet.

Janek said, "I know you have been trying to reach me for some weeks now. I'm sorry for the delay. I hope you understand that my time is not entirely my own. However, we're here now. —I have spoken to the Chief of the Service, by the way, and he gave you very high marks. He regrets your resignation."

Edwards said, eyes downcast, "It seemed better to pursue my investigations without danger of embarrassment to the Service."

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Janek's smile flashed. "Your activities, though discreet, have not gone unnoticed. The Chief explained that you have been investigating the Tercentenary Incident, and I must admit it was that which persuaded me to see you. You've given up your position for that? Mr. Edwards, you're investigating a dead issue."

"How can it be a dead issue, Mr. Janek? Your calling it an Incident doesn't alter the fact that it was an attempt to assassinate the President."

"A matter of semantics. Why use such a disturbing word?"

"Only because it represents a disturbing truth. Surely you agree that someone did try to kill the President?"

Janek spread his hands. "If that is so, the plot did not succeed. A mechanical device was destroyed. Nothing more. In fact, if we look at it properly, the Incident—or whatever you choose to call it—did the nation and the world enormous good. As we all know, the President was shaken by the Incident, and the nation as well. The President and all of us realized what a return to the violence of the last century might mean and that realization produced a great turnaround."

"I can't deny that."

"Of course, you can't. Even the President's enemies will grant that the past year has seen momentous accomplishments. The World Federation is far stronger today than anyone could have dreamed it would be on that Tercentenary day. We might even say that an imminent breakup of the global economy has been prevented."

Edwards said cautiously, "Yes, the President is a changed man. Everyone says so."

Janek said, "He was always a great man. The Incident made him concentrate on the vital issues with a fierce intensity."

"Which he didn't do before?"

"Perhaps not quite as intensely. —In effect then, the President, and all of us, would like the Incident itself forgotten. My main purpose in seeing you, Mr. Edwards, is to make that clear to you. This is not the twentieth century and we can't throw you in jail for being inconvenient to us, or hamper you in any way, but even the Global Charter doesn't forbid us to attempt persuasion. Do you understand me?"

"I understand you, but I do not agree with you. Can we forget the Incident when the person responsible has never been apprehended?"

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"Perhaps that is just as well, too, sir. Far better that some, uh, unbalanced person escape than that the matter be blown up out of all proportion and the stage set, possibly, for a return to the violence of the twentieth century."

"The official story even states that the robot exploded spontaneously—which is impossible, and which has been an unfair blow to the robot industry."

"A robot is not the term I would use, Mr. Edwards. It was a mechanical device. No one has said that robots are dangerous, per se, certainly not the workaday metallic ones. The only reference here is to the unusually complex man-like devices that seem like flesh and blood and that we might call androids. Actually, they are so complex that perhaps they *might* explode. I am not an expert in the field. The robotics industry will recover."

"Nobody in the government," said Edwards stubbornly, "seems to care whether we reach the truth or not."

"I've already explained that there have been no bad consequences, only good ones. Why stir the mud at the bottom, when the water above is clear?"

"And the use of the disintegrator?"

For a moment Janek's hand, which had been slowly turning the container of soya-sticks on his desk, held still, then it returned to its rhythmic movement. He said, lightly, "What's a disintegrator?"

Edwards said intently, "Mr. Janek, I think you know what I mean. As part of the Service—"

"To which you no longer belong."

"Nevertheless, as part of the Service, I could not help hearing things that were not always, I suppose, meant for my ears. I had heard of this new weapon, and I saw something happen at the Tercentenary celebration which would have required one. The object everyone thought was the President disappeared into a cloud of very fine dust. It was as though every atom within the object had had its bonds to other atoms loosened. The object had become a cloud of individual atoms, which began to combine again of course, but which dispersed too quickly to do more than look like a momentary glitter of dust."

"Very science-fictionish."

"I certainly don't understand the science behind it, Mr. Janek, but I do know that it would take considerable energy to accomplish such bond breaking. This energy would have to be with-

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drawn from the environment. Those people who were standing near the device at the time, and whom I could locate—and who would agree to talk—were unanimous in reporting a wave of extreme coldness washing over them."

Janek put the soya-stick container to one side with a small click of transite against cellulite. He said, "Suppose just for argument that there *is* such a thing as a disintegrator."

"You need not suppose. There is."

"I won't argue the point. I know of no such thing myself, but in my position I am not likely to know of anything so security-bound as new weaponry. But if a disintegrator does exist and is as secret as all that, it must be an American monopoly, unknown to the rest of the Federation. It would then be something neither you nor I should talk about. It could be a more deadly weapon of war than the nuclear bomb, precisely because—if what you say is so—it produces nothing more than disintegration at the point of impact and coldness in the immediate neighborhood. No blast, no fire, no deadly radiation. Without these dangerous side-effects there would be no deterrent to its use, yet for all we know it might be made large enough to destroy the planet itself."

"I go along with all that," said Edwards.

"Then you see that if there is no disintegrator, it is foolish to talk about one; and if there *is* a disintegrator, then it is criminal to talk about one."

"I haven't discussed it, except with you just now, because I'm trying to persuade you of the seriousness of the situation. If one had been used, for instance, ought not the government be interested in deciding how it came to be used—if another unit of the Federation might be in possession of it?"

Janek shook his head. "I think we can rely on the appropriate departments of this government to take such a thing into consideration. You had better not concern yourself with the matter."

Edwards said, in barely controlled impatience, "Can you assure me that the United States is the only government that has such a weapon at its disposal?"

"I can't tell you since I know nothing about such a weapon, and should not know. You should not have spoken of it to me. Even if no such weapon exists, the *rumor* of its existence could be damaging."

"But since I have told you and the damage is done, please hear me out. Let me have the chance of convincing you that *you*, and

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no one else, holds the key to a desperate situation that perhaps I alone see."

"You alone see? I alone hold the key?"

"Does that sound paranoid? Let me explain and then judge for yourself."

"I will give you a little more time, sir, but what I have said stands. You must abandon this—this hobby of yours—this investigation. It is terribly dangerous."

"It is its abandonment that would be dangerous. Don't you see that if the disintegrator exists and if the United States has the monopoly of it, then it follows that the number of people who could have access to one would be sharply limited. As an ex-member of the Service I have some practical knowledge of this and I tell you that the only person in the world who could manage to abstract a disintegrator from our top-secret arsenals would be the President. —Only the President of the United States, Mr. Janek, only he could have arranged that assassination attempt."

They stared at each other for a moment and then Janek touched a contact on his desk.

He said, "Added precaution. No one can overhear us now by any means. Mr. Edwards, do you realize the significance of that statement? To yourself? You must not overestimate the power of the Global Charter. A government has the right to take reasonable measures for the protection of its stability."

Edwards said, "I'm approaching you, Mr. Janek, as someone I presume to be a loyal American citizen. I come to you with news of a terrible crime that affects all Americans and the entire Federation, a crime that has produced a situation that only you can right. Why do you respond with veiled threats?"

Janek said, "That's the second time you have tried to make it appear that I am a potential savior of the world. I can't conceive of myself in that role. You understand, I hope, that I have no unusual powers."

"You are the President's personal secretary."

"That does not mean I have some special confidential relationship with him. There are times, Mr. Edwards, when I suspect others consider me nothing more than a flunky, and there are even times when I find myself agreeing with them."

"Nevertheless, you see him frequently, you see him informally, you see him—"

Janek said impatiently, "I see enough of him to be able to as-

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sure you that the President would not order the destruction of that mechanical device on the Tercentenary Day."

"Is it in your opinion impossible, then?"

"I did not say that. I said he would not do it. After all, why should he? Why should the President want to destroy a look-alike android that had been a valuable adjunct to him for over three years of his Presidency? And if for some reason he wanted it done, why on earth should he do it in so incredibly public a way—at the Tercentenary celebration, no less—thus advertising its existence, risking public revulsion at the thought that citizens have been shaking hands not with the President but with a mechanical device—to say nothing of the diplomatic repercussions of representatives of other parts of the Federation having done the same thing. He might, instead, simply have ordered it disassembled in private, then no one but a few highly placed members of the Administration would have known."

"There have not been, as you said, any undesirable consequences for the President as a result of the Incident, have there?"

"He has had to cut down on the number of ceremonial appearances and he no longer is as accessible as he once was."

"As the robot once was."

"Well," said Janek uneasily, "yes, I suppose that's right."

Edwards pressed on. "And, as a matter of fact, the President was re-elected and his popularity has not diminished even though the destruction of the robot was a public event. The argument against public destruction is not as powerful as you made it sound."

"But the re-election came about *despite* the Incident. It was brought about by the President's quick action in stepping forward and delivering what you will have to admit was one of the greatest speeches in American history. It was an absolutely amazing performance. You will have to admit that."

"I admit that it was a beautifully staged drama. The President, one might think, would have counted on that."

Janek sat back in his chair. "If I understand you, Edwards, you are suggesting an involuted storybook plot. Are you saying that the President had the device destroyed—in the middle of a huge crowd, at precisely the time of the Tercentenary celebration, with the entire world watching—so that he could win the admiration of all by his quick action? Are you suggesting that he arranged it all so that he could establish himself as a man of unexpected vigor

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and strength under extremely dramatic circumstances and thus turn a losing campaign into a winning one. —Mr. Edwards, you've been reading fairy tales."

Edwards said, "If I were trying to claim all that, it would indeed be a fairy tale, but I am not. I never suggested that the President ordered the killing of the robot. I merely asked if you thought it were possible and you have stated quite strongly that it wasn't. I'm glad you did, because I agree with you."

"Then what is this all about? I'm beginning to think you're wasting my time."

"Another minute, please. Have you ever asked yourself why the destruction couldn't have been done with a laser beam, with a field deactivator—even with a sledge-hammer? Why should anyone go to the incredible trouble of getting a weapon guarded by the strongest possible government security to do something that didn't require such a devastating weapon? Aside from the difficulty of getting it, why risk revealing the existence of a disintegrator to the rest of the world?"

"This whole business of a disintegrator is just your theory?"

"The robot disappeared completely before my eyes. I was watching. I rely on no second-hand evidence for that. It doesn't matter what you call the weapon; whatever name you give it, it had the effect of taking the robot apart atom by atom and scattering all those atoms irretrievably. Why should this have been done? It was tremendous over-kill."

"I don't know what was in the mind of the perpetrator."

"No? Yet it seems to me that there is only one logical reason for a complete powdering when something much simpler would have brought about the destruction. The powdering left no trace behind of the destroyed object. It left nothing to indicate what it had been, whether a robot"—Edwards paused—"or anything else."

Janek said, "But there is no question of what it was."

"Isn't there? I said only the President could have arranged for a disintegrator to be obtained and used. But, considering the existence of a look-alike robot, *which* President did the arranging?"

Janek said harshly, "I don't think we can carry on this conversation any further. You are mad."

Edwards said, "Think it through, sir. The President did not destroy the robot—your arguments on that score are convincing. What happened was that the robot destroyed the President. President Winkler was killed in the crowd on July 4, 2076. A robot *re-*

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sembling President Winkler then gave the Tercentenary speech, ran for re-election, was re-elected, and still serves as President of the United States."

"Madness!"

"I've come to you, to *you*, because *you* can prove this—and correct it, too."

"It is simply not so! The President is—the President." Janek made as though to rise and conclude the interview.

"You yourself admit he has changed," said Edwards, quickly and urgently. "The Tercentenary speech was beyond the powers of the old Winkler. Haven't you been yourself amazed at the accomplishments of the past year? Truthfully, could the Winkler of the first term have done all this?"

"Yes, he could have, because the President of the second term is the President of the first term."

"Do you deny he's changed? I put it to you. *You* decide and I'll abide by your decision."

"He's risen to meet the challenge, that is all. It's happened before in American history." But Janek sank back into his seat. He looked uneasy.

"He doesn't drink," said Edwards.

"He never did—very much."

"He no longer womanizes. Do you deny that he did so in the past?"

"A president is a man. For the last two years, however, he's felt completely dedicated to the problems of the Federation."

"It's a change for the better, I admit," said Edwards, "but it is a change. Of course, if he *had* a woman, the masquerade could not be carried on, could it?"

Janek said, "Too bad he doesn't have a wife." He pronounced the archaic word a little self-consciously. "The whole matter wouldn't arise if he did."

"The fact that he doesn't made the plot more workable. Yet he has fathered two children. I don't believe they have been in the White House, either one of them, since the Tercentenary celebration."

"Why should they be? They are grown, with lives of their own."

"Are they ever invited? Is the President ever interested in seeing them? You're his personal secretary. You would know. Are they?"

Janek said, "You're wasting time. A robot can't kill a human

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being. You know that is the first Law of Robotics."

"I know it. But no one is saying that the robot-Winkler killed the human-Winkler directly. When the human-Winkler was in the crowd, the robot-Winkler was on the speaker's stand, and I doubt that a disintegrator could be aimed from that distance without having done more widespread damage. Maybe it could, but more likely the robot-Winkler had an accomplice—a hit-man, to use twentieth-century jargon."

Janek frowned. His plump face puckered and looked pained. He said, "You know, madness must be catching. I'm actually beginning to consider the insane notion you've brought here. Fortunately, it doesn't hold water. After all, why would an assassination of the human-Winkler be arranged in public? All the arguments against destroying the robot in public hold against the killing of a human President in public. Don't you see that ruins your whole theory?"

"It does not—" began Edwards.

"It *does*. No one, except for a few officials, knew that the mechanical device existed at all. If President Winkler were killed privately and his body disposed of, the robot could easily have taken over without suspicion—without having roused yours, for instance."

"There would always be a few officials who would know, Mr. Janek. Assassination would have had to broaden." Edwards leaned forward earnestly. "See here, ordinarily there couldn't have been any danger of confusing the human being and the machine. I imagine the robot wasn't in constant use, but was brought out only for specific purposes, and there would always be key individuals, perhaps quite a number of them, who would know where the President was and what he was doing. If that were so, the assassination would have to be carried out at a time when those officials actually thought the President was really the robot."

"I don't follow you."

"Look at it this way. One of the robot's tasks was to shake hands with the crowd. When this was taking place, the officials in the know would be perfectly aware that the hand-shaker was, in truth, the robot."

"Exactly. You're making sense now. It *was* the robot."

"Except that it was the Tercentenary Day, and except that President Winkler could not resist. I suppose it would be more

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than human to expect a President—particularly an empty crowd-pleaser and applause-hunter like Winkler—to give up the adulation of the crowd on this day of all days, and hand it over to a machine. And perhaps the robot carefully nurtured this impulse so that on this one Tercentenary Day the President would have ordered the robot to remain behind on the speaker's platform, while Winkler himself went out to shake hands and to be cheered."

"Secretly?"

"Of course, secretly. If the President had told anyone in the Service, or any of his aides, or you, would he have been allowed to do it? The official attitude on the possibility of assassination has been practically a disease since the events of the late twentieth century. So with the encouragement of an obviously clever robot—"

"You assume the robot to be clever because you assume he is now serving as President. That is circular reasoning. If he is not President, there is no reason to think he was clever, or that he was capable of working out such a plot. Besides, what motive could possibly drive a robot to plot an assassination? Even if it didn't kill the President directly, the taking of a human life indirectly is also forbidden by the First Law, which states, 'A robot may not harm a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.' "

Edwards said, "The First Law is not absolute. What if harming a human being saves the lives of two others, or three others, or even three billion others? The robot may have thought that saving the World Federation took precedence over the saving of one life. It was no ordinary robot, after all. It was designed to duplicate the qualities of the President closely enough to deceive everyone. Suppose it had the human understanding of President Winkler, but without his weaknesses—and suppose it knew that it could save the Federation where the President could not?"

"*You* can reason so, but how do you know a mechanical device would?"

"It is the only way to explain what happened."

"I think it is a paranoid fantasy."

Edwards said, "Then tell me why the object that was destroyed was powdered into atoms. What else makes sense than to suppose that it was the only way to hide the fact that it was a human

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being who was destroyed, not a robot. Give me an alternate explanation."

Janek reddened. "I won't accept it!"

"But you can prove the whole matter—or disprove it. That's why I have come to you—to *you*."

"How can I prove it? Or disprove it, either?"

"No one sees the President at unguarded moments the way you do. It is with you—in default of family—that he is most informal. Study him."

"I have. I tell you he isn't a—"

"You haven't. You suspected nothing wrong. Little signs meant nothing to you. Study him now, being aware that he *might* be a robot."

Janek said sardonically, "I can knock him down and probe for metal with an ultrasonic detector. Even an android has a platinum-iridium brain."

"No such drastic action will be necessary. Just observe him and you will see that he is so radically not the man he was that he cannot be a man."

Janek looked at the clock calendar on the wall. He said, "We have been here nearly an hour."

"I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your time, sir, but you do see the importance of all this, don't you?"

"Importance?" said Janek. Then he looked up and what had seemed a despondent air turned suddenly into something of hope. "But is it, in fact, important? Really, I mean?"

"How can it *not* be important? To have a robot as President of the United States? That's not important?"

"No, that's not what I mean. Forget what President Winkler might be. Just consider this. Someone serving as President of the United States has saved the World Federation; he has held it together and, at the present moment he runs the Council in the interests of peace and constructive compromise. You'll admit all that?"

Edwards said, "Of course, I admit all that. But what of the precedent established? A robot in the White House for a very good reason now may lead to a robot in the White House ten years from now for a very bad reason, and then to robots in the White House for no reason at all but only as a matter of course. Don't you see the importance of muffling a possible trumpet call for the end of humanity at the time of its very first note?"

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Janek shrugged. "Suppose I find out that he is a robot? Do we broadcast it to the world? Do you realize how that will affect the Federation? Do you realize what it will do to the world's financial structure? Do you realize—"

"I do realize. That is why I have come to you privately, instead of trying to make it public. It is up to you to check and come to a definite conclusion. It is then up to you—having found the supposed President to be a robot, which I am certain you will find is true—to persuade him to resign."

"And by your version of his reaction to the First Law, he will then have me killed since I will be threatening his expert handling of the greatest global crisis of the twenty-first century."

Edwards shook his head. "The robot acted in secret before, and no one tried to counter the arguments he used with himself. You will be able to reinforce stricter interpretation of the First Law with your arguments. If necessary, we can get the aid of a high official at the U.S. Robots Corporation, which constructed the robot in the first place. Once he resigns, the Vice-President will succeed. If the robot-Winkler has put the old world on the right track, good; it can then be kept on the right track by the Vice-President, who is an able and honorable woman. But we can't have a robot-ruler, and we mustn't ever again."

"What if the President is human?"

"I'll leave that to you. You will know."

Janek said, "I am not that confident of myself. What if I can't decide? If I can't bring myself to? If I don't dare to? What are your plans?"

Edwards looked immensely tired. "I don't know. I may have to go to the U.S. Robots Corporation. But I don't think it will come to that. I'm quite confident, now that I've laid the problem in your lap, you won't rest till it's settled. Do *you* want to be ruled by a robot?"

He stood up, and Janek let him go. They did not shake hands.

Janek sat there in the gathering twilight.

A robot!

The man had walked in and had argued, in a perfectly rational manner, that the President of the United States was a robot!

It should have been easy to fight that off. Yet though Janek had tried every argument he could think of, they had all been useless, and the man had not been shaken in the least.

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A robot as President! Edwards had been *certain* of it, and he would *stay* certain of it. And if Janek insisted that the President was human, Edwards would then go to the U.S. Robots Corporation. He wouldn't rest until the issue was resolved.

Janek frowned as he thought of the fifteen months since Tercentenary Day and of how well all had gone in the face of the probabilities. And now?

He remained lost in somber thought.

He still had the disintegrator, but surely it would not be necessary to use it on another human being. A silent laser stroke in some lonely spot would suffice.

It had been hard to maneuver the President into the earlier assassination, but in this present case the robot-President wouldn't even have to know.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

VENERATION GAP

by C. McINERNEY

How I yearn for the yarns of my youth
With their clues slowly yielding the truth.
Now whodunits are cuter—
Crimes are solved by computer.
Where's the fun in a mechanized sleuth?

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a *NEW* short story by
JANE SPEED

The Charles Logan family—father, daughter, son—as seen through the eyes of Blanche, their housekeeper-cook-and-maid-of-all-work, all living peacefully in the summer-resort town of Lakeside. Life with the Logans was going along pretty much as usual—until that last summer . . .

VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

by JANE SPEED

I never could see the point to going around with a long face. I like to kid back and forth with people, crack a few jokes, you know—keep things cheerful. Of course, it comes a little harder now—since I lost my family.

There were just the three of them, the mister and the two young ones, Susan and Jamie. That Jamie! He was just a little fella, not quite two years old, when I first come there. Curly hair, big brown eyes, sweetest child you ever want to see.

I never met the missus. She passed away before they moved to Lakeside. I think that's why there was always a touch of sadness in the mister's eyes, even when he laughed. Logan was his name—Charles Logan.

He'd hired an older woman first off, but she had kids of her own and didn't like to live in.

Well, that was sure no problem in my case. I remember my dad, just the year before he went, he come right out and told me—he was always a blunt-spoken man—"Blanche," he says, "God didn't give you the looks to get a husband, so you better hustle around and make yourself useful if you want to get along in the world." And that's what I did—started in working when I was 16. I was big for my age, though, and good and strong, so I always did all right. Day work it was, mostly for the summer people. Lakeside was kind of a vacation town and summer was our busy time.

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Anyways, like I said, with nobody but myself to worry about, why, I was just tickled pink to get a steady place. I pitched right in and kept that house spick-and-span and, while I never learned to cook fancy, I always put three good square meals on the table. And there was never a day those children didn't have fresh-washed clothes to wear.

I still have a picture the mister took of Susan the day she started school, in a red and white pinafore and red bows on her pigtails, looking proud and excited and just a little bit scared. And then a couple of years later there's Jamie all scrubbed and clean and hanging onto his big sister's hand for dear life. Oh, they were full of mischief, those two, but they were good kids. Good as gold. And no wonder, with a daddy like they had.

He was an educated man, the mister was. Had more books than I'd ever seen before in one house. Hardly anything he didn't know—all kinds of funny little stuff. Like when he first heard my name, he just smiles that nice smile of his and says, "Well, how do you do, Miss White White." My last name's White, you see, and he right away explained how Blanche means white, too. I got the biggest kick out of that. Made my old name seem something special.

I often wondered how he happened to settle in Lakeside. Oh, it was a nice enough town, 'specially in summer. But I don't think there's many people ever heard of it outside the ones that come back year after year. It wasn't like one of those famous resorts, you know. Anyways, I asked him about it once and he said he'd come there a few times years ago, when he was a boy. Come up on vacation with his folks. Then, after his missus went, he was trying to think of somewhere to get the young ones away to and he remembered Lakeside. And it suited him so well he just stayed on.

He'd been some kind of a writer. Still was, more or less. Many's the time during the off-season I'd hear him pecking away at his typewriter till all hours. Now and then he sold something, and when he got the check he'd bring home a treat for supper and I'd bake a cake and we'd have a real celebration.

He made his living mainly in the summer, though, like most people around there. He'd got himself a launch and he took parties out on tours of the little islands on our lake. Did real well at it, too. He kept his boat trim and he was a nice-looking man and had a pleasant way with him. And he'd read up on the local his-

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tory so he could tell folks a lot of interesting things—how it was in Indian times and all.

And, of course, it didn't hurt a bit that the ladies took a particular shine to him. Seems there was always a lot more women than men around there in the summer. Even the married ones, a good part of the season their husbands only come out on weekends. Anyways, the mister would always joke back and forth with them, young and old alike, and they just ate it up.

Mel Jarvis used to kid him about that. Mel owned the hardware store in town. "Charlie Logan here," he used to say, "is one of our great natural attractions."

The summer people would start to come in around June, and we were always mighty glad to see them. Well, for one thing, they were our bread and butter. But most of them were pretty good folks, you know. That Mrs. Corbett now, a widow lady, she owned the place just next up the way from ours, and she was always nice and friendly as could be.

Still, when the last of them left after Labor Day, that was kind of nice, too. Like when you have your house to yourself again after company goes. And there was plenty else to do. You had to get the kids ready to start school and pretty soon there was Thanksgiving to think about and then Christmas and, well, before you knew it, it was time to get things spruced up again for the summer crowd.

So that's the way the years went. There was a pleasant sort of pattern to them, if you know what I mean. You could just about count on certain things happening at certain times. Until that last summer.

There was no sign it was going to be any different. Oh, Susan was going on 17 by then—had just one more year of high school—and pretty as a picture, too. So, of course, Jamie was forever teasing her about her boy friends. But outside of that things seemed pretty much as usual.

You remember I mentioned that nice Mrs. Corbett who owned the house next over? You could see her place, with the little wood pier out back, right from our kitchen window. Well, come June I'd always keep an eye out, and as soon as I saw the house was open I'd fix a basket of vegetables from our garden and take it over to her.

Anyways, when I saw the windows up one morning I figured she must have come in the night before, and I took my basket

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right out to the garden. Just shows what habit can do to a person. I had that basket half filled before I remembered she'd said she probably wouldn't be coming up this year. Her nephew and his family had moved out west and she thought she'd spend the summer with them and maybe just rent out her place in Lakeside. So I went back indoors feeling kind of let down.

I kept glancing across the way from time to time, though, because I'd got to thinking maybe she'd changed her mind and it was her over there after all. So it was a real surprise when suddenly this other woman come out back. Believe me, she was about as different from Mrs. Corbett as could be.

Mrs. Corbett was a lady of middle years, you see, and a bit on the portly side. This one looked about half her age. She sure wasn't much more than half her size. Slim and elegant, like one of those models you see in the magazines, big sunglasses and all. She was wearing tight-fitting pants and a skimpy top—looked real good in them, too—and those funny shoes with soles about four inches thick. They always put me in mind of a person with two clubfeet, but they were the big fashion then and all the girls wanted them. Susan had been pestering the mister for a pair, but so far he'd held out—said she was too likely to break an ankle or even her neck trying to walk in them.

Well, this young lady stood there for a while looking around. Looked over towards our place so long I wondered what she was staring at. Then I saw Susan out back taking her bathing suit off the line. She must've come around by the side of the house.

"Hey," I called out to her, "I thought you'd already left."

"Oh, boy, so did I!" She laughed and come inside all breathless. "But there's been a change of plans. Betsy Jarvis' dad said we could take their outboard over to one of the islands for a picnic. So I had to come back and get my suit."

"You'll be home for supper, though, won't you?"

"Oh, sure. You know her dad—he'd have a fit if we kept that boat out a minute past five thirty. I've got to run, Richie and Bob are waiting for me. But, oh Blanche, guess *what*? Richie's getting his own *sailboat* next week!" She gave me a little squeeze and then she was off like a shot.

By that time, of course, the lady next door had gone back inside, and I had so much to do I forgot all about her. Jamie'd gone out on the launch with his dad that day, and I wanted to give the house a good cleaning while I had them all out from underfoot.

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It must've been after three o'clock—I'd finished the cleaning and just put a pot roast on for supper—when I heard this clop-clop-clop sound out front. Well, you can believe it or not, but the first thing I thought of was that lady and her cloppy shoes. And, sure enough, when I peeked through the curtains there she was coming along the brick walk. What's more, she turned right into our place. So I quick run a comb through my hair and went to the door.

"Good afternoon," she said, all smiles. "I'm Claire Chalmers. I've taken the house next door for the summer."

"I know. I saw you over there on the pier this morning. Nice to meet you."

And she just laughed like I'd said something comical. "I guess I'd better watch my step with you on the lookout. Tell me, this *is* where the Logan family lives, isn't it?"

"Why, yes, it is." Her knowing the name kind of took me by surprise. "But there's none of them here right now."

"I see. Well, may I come in then and wait?"

"If you like," I said, which was about all I could say since she was already inside. "Of course, if it's the kids you want to see, you'll have quite a wait. Susan's gone on a picnic and Jamie, once he gets off the launch, usually plays baseball till suppertime. The mister should be back around four, though."

"That will do very well for now," she said, taking off her dark glasses and looking around. " 'The mister' and I have a lot of reminiscing to do."

That slim figure of hers had fooled me. Made her look taller at a distance, for one thing. And up close now I could see she wasn't as young as I'd thought either. Oh, she was good-looking all right, and her makeup was put on real nice. But underneath it I bet she wasn't all that far from Mrs. Corbett's age.

And it was the funniest thing. Small as she was, she had a way about her that didn't allow for any back talk. She was a lady used to being in charge, you could see that. Walked right into the living room and sat herself down in the best chair like it had been put there special for her.

"And you," she said, "must be Blanche."

Well, now, that *really* surprised me. She might know the mister and the kids from somewhere else, but she'd never laid eyes on me before.

It must've showed in my face because she laughed again and

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said, "Mrs. Corbett told me a lot about this household."

"Oh, so you're a friend of Mrs. Corbett's."

"Well, I don't think I can quite claim that. Mrs. Corbett and I met for the first time only recently. And, frankly, I doubt that our paths ever would have crossed if we hadn't both happened to contribute rather generously to the same charity. There was a party, you see, in honor of the major contributors. I think it was meant to be our reward, but it turned out to be more like a punishment—too many people, too few chairs, execrable food.

"At any rate, Mrs. Corbett and I found ourselves pinned into a corner at this dreary affair, so we really hadn't much choice but to introduce ourselves and try to make conversation. It wasn't easy, because we didn't seem to have much in common. But I must say Mrs. Corbett did her best, dear soul. She rattled away about all sorts of things—her relatives, some little out-of-the-way place she spent her summers, the nice neighbors she had there, and so on. I'm afraid I wasn't really paying very strict attention, until suddenly I caught the name of Charlie Logan. And when she told me that he did indeed have a daughter named Susan and a son named Jamie, I was certain it was the same Charlie Logan I knew. Well, to make a long story short, I discovered that Mrs. Corbett wasn't planning to use her house this summer and she had been thinking of renting it, so we made a deal right on the spot—and here I am."

All I could think of to say was, "Well! I guess it was a lucky thing you went to that party after all."

"Oh, my dear girl! It was the greatest piece of luck I've had in years. Worth every dull moment, believe me."

I just didn't know what to make of her. She talked so much and smiled so much—with her mouth, anyways, I wasn't so sure about her eyes. And as far as I knew, she'd never set foot in that house before, yet there she sat looking right at home while I perched on the edge of a chair feeling like I was the stranger.

I guess I'd been staring at her because she said, "Is something wrong?"

"Oh, no, I—I was just admiring your earrings." Which wasn't altogether a fib. They really caught your eye—little silvery dangles that moved in a pretty way when she talked.

"They are rather nice, aren't they? They're handcrafted—no two pairs alike, you know. In fact"—she pulled them off and passed them over to me—"even these two are not quite identical."

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It was true. Oh, they were meant to be a pair, all right. But up close you could see little differences in them, and they looked expensive. I handed them back to her and she clipped them on again.

"Could I get you a glass of lemonade?" I asked her. "Or maybe some iced tea?"

"No, no, don't bother. But if I could have an ashtray—"

"Oh, sure thing." And I quick fetched her one, just glad of something to do.

She lit up a cigarette and settled back in her chair. "How long have you been with the Logans, Blanche?"

"Well, let me see . . . it was early spring when I come to them, so it's going on twelve years now."

"Twelve years!" For a minute there even her mouth stopped smiling. "That's a long time. You must know them very well."

"Oh, yes, ma'am. Why, I guess there's hardly anything I don't know about the family."

She puffed away at her cigarette a couple of seconds more, then she stubbed it out. "Well, there's evidently one thing you don't know about them." Then she looked straight at me and said, "*I* am Susan's and Jamie's grandmother."

Well, it hit me like a ton of bricks. I just couldn't take it in. The mister had said his own folks passed away some years back and I'd always figured it was the same on the missus' side. It was funny he'd never mentioned a word about this one. But I knew he must've had a good reason.

Then, before I could get my thoughts collected, I heard his laugh outside. I remember to this day just how it sounded—I guess because I never heard him laugh much after that. He was talking to Joe Thompson from the grocery. They sometimes walked up this way together. Anyways, I heard them say goodbye and I just got up and made a beeline for the front door. I had it in mind that I ought to try to warn him somehow.

But I wasn't quick enough. He come up the porch steps and right in the screen door and I'd no more than opened my mouth when she beat me to it.

"You have company, Charles," she called out behind me.

The mister stopped dead-still. Then he looked over my shoulder and saw her sitting there, and a little muscle in his jaw kind of jumped. He took a deep breath and said, "Hello, Claire," and then went on into the living room and sat down.

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"You're looking very well," she said, lighting another cigarette. "And you."

It was funny. They spoke so polite and careful and all, yet they put me in mind of a couple of dogs circling each other for a fight.

I was still standing there beyond the archway—afraid to stay and afraid to go, if you know what I mean. Then she settled it. She turned to me and said, "I'm sure you must have something to do in the kitchen, Blanche."

So I went into the kitchen and closed the door. But that catch never did work right and the door come back open an inch or so. And I'll be honest with you, I didn't bother to ease it shut. I never before or since listened at a door, I swear. But I did that day and I did it on purpose. There was something in the air in that room made me uneasy, and I wanted to know what it was. I just took a quick look at my pot roast and then I tiptoed back to the door.

"Well, Charles," she started right in. "So this is where you've been hiding away. A perfect spot. Lakeside. Even the name is a dime a dozen. And from what I've seen of it, it's hardly the sort of place anyone I know would ever hear of, much less visit. That, of course, is what you counted on, isn't it?"

"Yes." His voice was so much quieter than hers, kind of tired-sounding, that I had to listen sharp to catch his words. "And it worked—for quite a while. May I ask how you did happen to find us?"

"By a fluke, pure and simple. After all these years fate sat me down next to a plump little party named Corbett who went on at great length about her nice summer neighbor, Charlie Logan. I've taken her house for the season."

"I see. Well, I suppose something like that was bound to happen sooner or later."

"It's so ironic, really. When I think of all the time and effort I spent trying to find you . . . I wanted to go right to the police, you know, but my lawyer talked me out of that. He said it just wasn't a police matter. Technically, you had committed no crime. You couldn't be charged with kidnaping. They were your own children, and those grubby little neighbors of yours saw you as quite the devoted father. And you hardly qualified as a missing person since you'd obviously left of your own volition—settled your affairs and just moved out bag and baggage. So, instead, I hired a private investigator.

"I rather thought you would."

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"For all the good it did. Oh, he tried, I'll say that for him. Put several men on it. Questioned all your friends and associates, everyone who'd ever spoken two words with you and Ann. But he couldn't shake a single one of them. They all loyally maintained they had no idea where you'd gone."

"They hadn't. They still don't."

"My God, how could you cut all ties like that?"

He took almost a minute before he answered her. "I hated to do it. But I felt I couldn't take that chance, put that burden on them. None of them would have given me away intentionally, but all it would take was one slip of the tongue. And if we'd kept in touch—well, I wouldn't have put it past you to find a way to check their mail. Maybe you even had some of them followed."

"I did, for many months. Oh, I ran up quite a bill."

"Well, there you are then."

"It's incredible. Just when you were beginning to establish yourself. Don't you write at all any more?"

"A little. But not under my own name. I knew you'd watch for that."

"Why, then you had to start all over again!"

"That's true."

"You fool! You unmitigated, stubborn, wicked fool! After the fuss you made about your precious little 'career,' after what Ann had to put up with so you could pursue it, you simply walked away from it. And all that just to spite me. It wasn't enough that you tried to turn my daughter against me. Once she was gone, you had to rob me of my grandchildren. Do you realize I haven't had even a glimpse of them for twelve years? *Twelve years,* Charles! How could you do such a thing to me?"

"Claire, believe me, I didn't do what I did *to* you or anyone. For better or worse, I did it *for* the children. It was the only way I could see to give them a chance to be themselves, to grow up without being hounded and managed and *owned*—the way poor Ann was."

" 'Poor Ann,' is it? Well, let me tell you something, Charles Logan. There was nothing poor about my daughter's life while *I* was in charge. I saw to it that she always had the best of everything."

"So you did, Claire, whether she wanted it or not. And you never let up, even after we were married."

"Well, what was wrong with that? I had plenty and she was my only child. Why shouldn't I see that she had decent clothes and a

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proper vacation once in a while? And I could have done much more—for both of you—if only you hadn't been so mired in foolish pride. You know the trouble with you, Charles? You just never learned to accept gifts gracefully. Quite a few people have that failing."

"Possibly. But the trouble with your largess, Claire, was that it always had strings attached. It was like an investment that gave you the controlling shares in the life of whoever received it."

She laughed a short, nasty little laugh. "What a convenient theory to justify your stubbornness. And, oh, how stubborn you were. If only you could at least have let me get you and Ann out of that squalid little apartment—"

He cut right in. "It wasn't 'squalid.' It wasn't even all that little. And Ann didn't want to leave it any more than I did. As a matter of fact, she told me once that she'd been happier there than anywhere else she'd ever lived."

"Indeed." She said it in a very ladylike way, but you could tell he'd really got to her. "Well. If she was so happy there—with you—then why did she kill herself?"

I could hardly believe I'd heard her right. And it was so deathly still in there for so long I was almost afraid to breathe.

"Well, Charles? Have you got a 'theory' about that?"

"I think, Claire—you and I"—he spoke so slow and heavy, like every word come hard—"between the two of us we had Ann on a rack. She was pulled in opposite directions so—mercilessly—that she was finally torn apart. I just—I just couldn't let that happen to Susan and Jamie, too."

"I see. And so you solved the problem by pulling them entirely in *your* direction. Really, Charles! How you can delude yourself that you did such a selfish thing 'for the children.' It was all very well for you. You made a conscious decision, however foolish, to hole up in this godforsaken little backwater. But what right did you have to impose such limitations on Susan and Jamie, to deny them all the advantages I could have provided?"

"They've been happy here. I don't think they've wanted for anything important."

"Oh, well—children. They can be happy anywhere, especially if they don't know any better. But did you *really* think this little summer kind of existence you have here could go on forever? I saw Susan out in your back yard this morning and, believe me, Charles, she is no longer a child."

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"I know that. She'll be ready for college next year."

"Well, thank heaven I found you in time to see that she goes to a decent college at least."

Right about then I went over to the stove to turn off the fire under the pot roast, and it was just a lucky thing I did. I'd have hated to have the kids catch me listening at the door.

They came tiptoeing in the back way and Susan kind of whispered, "Who *is* that in there with daddy?"

"I better leave that for him to tell you," I said.

"Aw, Blanche, come on," Jamie coaxed. "Who is it?"

"Never you mind now. You just help your sister get the table set. I'm running a little late here. And put on an extra place, will you? I think she may be staying to supper."

Well, they got out the plates and silverware and took them into the dining room. But they got to teasing each other and making such a clatter I was afraid they'd wind up breaking something, so I went in to put a stop to it. And right at that moment *she* come around by the hall with the mister following behind.

"Well," she said, earrings twinkling and that smile going full blaze, "Susan and Jamie. How wonderful to see you at last."

The kids just looked kind of blank—you could hardly blame them—and she turned to the mister and said, "I think you'd better introduce us, Charles."

So he come right out with it—wasn't much else he could do. "This is your grandmother," he said. "We lost touch with each other for a long time, but now she's come to visit us."

"You just call me Claire," she chimed in real quick. "It's so much shorter." And maybe it was better, too. She sure didn't look like anyone you'd call Grandma.

Anyways, I'd been right about supper. She stayed. As a matter of fact, she had supper with us just about every night for the next month or so. Never ate much, though. You could see why she stayed so thin.

It took Jamie a while to warm up to her, but Susan was just bowled over right from the start. Spent most of the time next door and all she could talk about was Claire this and Claire that. Her friend Richie got his sailboat, but Susan hardly took any notice. I guess it didn't seem like much after all those yachts her grandmother kept telling us about.

And every few days the two of them would drive off in that long shiny car of hers—go to some town nearby that had bigger stores

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and come back with all kinds of new clothes and stuff. You can bet it wasn't long before Susan had a pair of those cloppy shoes she'd been wanting. And, "Oh, guess *what?*" she says one day, "Claire's going to take me to *Europe* next summer. It'll be my graduation present."

It was like seeing Susan get sucked into a whirlwind, and just about as easy to stop. Oh, the mister did try once. One night at supper near the end of July this Claire announced she's going back to the city for a week.

"You see, Charles," she said, "it just occurred to me what an advantage it would be for Susan if she could have at least one year at Ann's old preparatory school. Of course, the registration for the fall semester closed long ago. But after all, her mother was a graduate and I've been *very generous* to that school over the years. I'm quite sure I can persuade them to make room for Susan."

"No." The mister laid down his knife and fork. "I won't let you do that, Claire. Susan should finish at Lakeside High. She's done well there and that's where her friends are."

"But, Charles, she'll soon be making a whole new set of friends at college. And she'll feel so much more—comfortable—with them if she goes from a good private school. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Some things may change, but that never does."

The mister got that grim set to his jaw and said, "What do *you* want, Susan?"

Susan looked from one to the other, and you could see she hated to take sides. I couldn't help thinking of what the mister had said about her mother being caught between the two of them. I guess he remembered that, too, because he tried to give her a little smile and said, "It's all right, honey. Whatever you want to do will be fine with me."

"Well"—she hesitated a minute—"it would be sort of nice to go to the same school my mother did."

So that was that. The next morning the grandmother come out all dressed for the city. "I don't think this will take me more than a week," she said. "I plan to be back sometime after noon next Saturday." And off she drove in her long shiny car.

Well, sir, once she was gone it was like we'd all woke up from some kind of spell. In no time at all there was Susan hanging around again with Betsy and Richie and Bob, and Jamie was down at the sandlot playing baseball again, and suppertime was

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so nice and easy with just the four of us. That whole week, I swear, you could almost believe she'd never been there at all.

But she had, of course, and she was coming back. And before you know it, there it was Friday already. Well, I just wanted to make the most of that last day without her—cook something special, you know. I'd got a nice ham because they were all so fond of it. And as soon as everybody'd left—Susan was spending the day sailing with Richie and the others, and Jamie was going out on the launch with his dad—I got busy and baked a cake. Took me a while with icing and all, so I just gave the house a lick and a promise.

Then about a quarter to three I put my ham in the oven and hiked on down to Thompson's to get some fresh sweet corn. I kidded around there with Joe for a couple of minutes and then I stopped in at the hardware store and bought myself a new squeeze mop. The metal clamp on my old one hadn't been working right for some time.

I don't think I was gone more than half an hour. But when I turned in the walk at our place I looked over next door and there was that long shiny car parked at Mrs. Corbett's. The sight of it just took the heart right out of me. Why did she have to come back early and cheat us out of this last day?

Well, I sure didn't want to see her any sooner than I had to, so I ducked inside. From the frying pan into the fire, you might say. Because when I went out to the kitchen there she was, still in her city clothes, those earrings jiggling away, fussing around over by the sink.

I can't tell you what a shock that was, seeing her making herself right at home in my kitchen. I just stood there like a dummy, my groceries in one hand and my mop in the other. Must've looked a fool.

"Oh, *there* you are, Blanche. I finished up all my business a day early, so surprise! Here I am back." She gave me the big smile and went right on with whatever she was doing while she talked. "Really, I had such wonderful luck. There was no trouble at all about Susan. *And*—I have good news for Jamie, too. A friend of mine introduced me to the headmaster of an excellent prep school and—well, you'll hear all about it later."

I set the groceries down on the table. "May I ask what you're doing over there?" I finally managed to say.

"Well, some of these things were packed in dry ice, so I thought

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I'd better get them into the refrigerator before I changed my clothes. They're some goodies I brought for our dinner. You see? We can make a lovely salad with this cold lobster. And I brought a box of those heavenly pastries I was telling Susan about, and some—"

"I already got supper started," I told her.

"Oh, you mean in the oven. Well, I turned that off. Really, Blanche, it's much too warm a day to have the oven going. You just save whatever you have in there for another time." And she turned back to unwrapping her stuff, still chattering away, but I wasn't even listening any more.

I thought of all the trouble she'd caused, and more to come, and—I don't know—something just all of a sudden come over me. I gripped the handle of that new mop with both hands and I walked right over and whacked her—so hard one of those darned earrings flew off.

It really caught her unawares. She gave a little gasp and grabbed hold of the sink to steady herself. Oh, I was done for, I knew that. The minute she got her wind back she was going to turn around and order me out of that house forever. So I don't know why I should've felt like laughing, but I did. I couldn't help it, she looked so funny standing there.

Only, then, instead of turning around, she sagged sideways against the drainboard and just sort of slipped on down to the floor. I could see then there was blood on the side of her head and, well, I sure wasn't laughing any more. The metal clamp on that mop had mean corners and I'd hit her a pretty good wallop.

I knew I ought to try to do something for her, but I just couldn't seem to move. I couldn't take my eyes off her face. She had such a peculiar look—she was staring at me and yet she wasn't. Then after a while it come to me that she'd never once blinked. I guess that's when I knew she was gone.

Well, the mister was so nice, he did everything he could—hired me a lawyer and all. But I couldn't deny I'd done a terrible thing and I knew I had to pay for it.

And it's not so bad here, you know. I never was afraid of hard work and, like I said, I'm always cracking little jokes with everybody, so I get along fine.

Now and then, though, at night, I lie awake a long time and I get to thinking back. And I wish—oh, I just wish in the worst way that it was summer again.

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a *NEW* short story by
DAVIS GRUBB

One of the most unusual stories we have ever published, and one of the most damning indictments of the horrors of War we have ever read in fiction, this poetic, deeply felt story will, we predict, become a favorite of anthologists, in and out of the mystery-suspense field . . .

CRY HAVOC

by DAVIS GRUBB

In 1923 the family Pollixfen migrated from Eire to settle in the small Ohio river town of Glory, West Virginia. Sean Pollixfen was a big florid boast of a man of common heritage. His wife, Deirdre, was a lady of gentle breeding; raised in a Georgian townhouse in Dublin's Sackville Street, she deplored Sean's harsh upbringing of their only child—ten-year-old Benjamin Michael.

The Pollixfen house was a rambling one-story structure with a great blue front door and slate flagstones set level with its threshold. Their nearest neighbor was a man named Hugger who dwelt a good three blocks up Liberty Avenue.

When the Thing began, it was an autumn night at supper. Benjy abruptly laid down his knife and fork and tilted his ear, harking. "But for what?" Sean asked him.

"I was listening for the auguries of the War that's coming, sor."

"Wisht, now, boyo!" cried Sean. " 'Tis 1932. The Great War ended fourteen years ago this November. And surely there's not another one in sight."

Sean paused, reminiscing, smiling.

"Still, somehow I'd favor another War," he said. "I'm proud to be wearing the sleeve of this good linen jacket pinned up to me left shoulder. I lost that hook at First Ypres. Yet, despite that, it was a Glory."

Benjy made no reply, though a moment later he left the table, went to the bathroom, and threw up his supper.

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Next morning at eight two men pulled up in a truck out front. Moments later they had laboriously borne a huge pine crate to the flagstone threshhold and rang the bell. Sean, on his way to his Position at the Firm, answered their ring.

"Is this here the residence of Master Benjamin Michael Pollixfen?"

"It is that," Sean replied, rapping the crate with his malacca cane. "'Tis another gift for me boy Benjy from his Uncle Liam in Kilronan. He's always sending the lad a grand present, no matter what the occasion!"

That night when they had finished supper, Sean went to Benjy's room. He stared at the great crate's contents, all ranked round the room so thick that one could scarce walk among them. There were 5000 miniature lead soldiers—Boche, French, and English. There was every manner of ammunition and instrument of warfare, from caissons and howitzers to hangars and tarmac for the landing fields of the miniature aircraft of all varieties and types—from Gotha bombers for the Boche to D.H.4's for the British and Bréguets for the French.

"Now Liam is showing good sense," Sean said. "Rocking horses were fine for you a year ago. But you're ten now, Benjy. 'Tis time you learned the lessons of Life's most glorious Game!"

Benjy stared at the little soldiers, cast and tinted down to the very wrinkle of a puttee, the drape of a trenchcoat. Moreover, no two soldiers wore the same facial expressions. Benjy could read in these faces Fear, Zest, Valor, Humdrum, Cravenness, Patriotism, and Sedition. And somehow each of them seemed waiting. But for what? For whom? Sean missed seeing these subtleties. Yet Benjy saw. Benjy knew. Aye, he knew all too well.

"They are green, dads," Benjy said. "Green as the turf of Saint Stephens Green park. The British officers are just days out of Sandhurst, the gun crews hardly a fortnight from the machine-gun school at Wisquies. They don't know the noise of a whizbang from a four-ten or a five-nine. Yet once they've been through a bloody baptism such as Hannescamps or the Somme they'll know. Aye, they'll know then."

"And what would *you* be knowing of Hannescamps or the Somme?" Sean chuckled.

Benjy made no reply.

And so the three strange weeks of it began. Benjy spent every waking hour working feverishly in the great black lot of non-

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arable ground beyond Deirdre's flower-and-kitchen garden. While about him all the world seemed filled with the sound of locusts sawing down the great green tree of summer.

Benjy carved out the laceries of trenches with his Swiss Army knife. He found strips of lath and split them to lay down as duckboards. He sandbagged the trenches well in front. Beyond this he staked, on ten-penny nails, the thin barbed wire which had come on spools in the great crate. Some distance to the rear of both sides he set up his little field hospitals, and his hangars and the tarmac fields for the little fighter, reconnaissance, and bombing planes.

At the kitchen door Sean would watch the boy and listen as Benjy chanted songs that Sean and his man had sung at Locrehof Farm or Trone Woods once they'd billeted down for a night in some daub-and-wattle stable. He could fairly smell the sweet ammoniac scent of the manure of kine, lambs, and goats, and the fragrance as well of the Gold Flake and State Express cigarettes they smoked, saving only enough to barter for a bottle or two of Pichon Longueville '89 or perhaps a liter of Paul Ruinart.

Strange to relate, it had not yet begun to trouble Sean that the boy knew of these things, that he sang songs Sean had never taught him and sometimes in French which *no one* had ever taught him. As for Benjy he soon began to show the strain. Deirdre's scale in the bathroom showed that in ten days he had lost twelve pounds. He seldom finished supper. For there was that half-hour's extra twilight to work in. Sean gloated. Dierdre grieved.

"Why in Saint Brigid's blessed name don't you put an end to it?" she would plead.

"No, woman, I shan't."

"And why not then?"

"Because me boyo shall grow up to be what I wanted for meself—a soldier poet more glorious than Rupert Brooke or the taffy Wilfred Owen."

"And then dead of their cursed war—dead before they could come to full flower of Saint Brigid's sacred gift."

"So much the better," Sean replied icily one night. "We must all die one day or another. And no man knows the hour. Death it has no clocks. Moreover, we are Pollixfens. Kin on me father's side to Eire's glory of poets—William Butler Yeats."

"But Yeats died in no war," Deirdre protested.

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"Better he had," Sean said. " 'Twould have increased his esteem a thousandfold."

Deirdre went off to bed weeping.

Next night in Benjy's room Sean spoke his dreams out plain.

" 'Tis stark truth, old man," he said. "Real War is a rough go. But there is that Glory of Glories in it."

Benjy said nothing.

"Don't you understand me, boyo? Glory!"

"I see no Glory," said the child. "I see poor fools butchering each other for reasons kept secret from them. Oh, they give reasons. King and Country. They leave out, of course, Industry. No, dads, there are no fields of Honor. There are only insane abattoirs."

Sean colored at this, got up and strode from the boy's room. Yet a minute later, unable to contain himself, he was back.

"Now, boyo!" he cried out. "Either you shed from yourself these craven, blasphemous, and treasonable speculations or I shall leave you to grow up and learn War the hard way. As did I."

"And what might that mean, sor?"

"It means that I shall go to Al Hugger's ga-rage and fetch home three ten-gallon tins of petrol and douse the length and breadth of your little No Man's Land of toys and then set a lucifer to it."

"That would be a most fearsome mistake, sor. For on the morning when the little armies came they were mine. Now I am Theirs. And so, poor dads, are you."

"That does it then! 'Tis petrol and a lucifer for all five thousand of the little perishers!"

Benjy smiled. Sadly.

"But 'tis no longer a skimpy five thousand now, man dear. 'Tis closer to a million. Perhaps more. Even files-on-parade could not count their hosts."

"Wisht, now! How could that be? Did Liam send you another great crate?"

"No, sor. There's been Conscription on both sides. And enlistments by the million. A fair fever of outrage infects every man and boy of the King's Realm from Land's End to Aberdeen since Lord Kitchener went down in one of his Majesty's dreadnaughts off the Dolomites. Then there's Foch and Clemenceau and Joffre. They've whipped up the zest of Frenchmen to a pitch not known since the days of Robespierre and Danton in the Terror. In Germany the Boche seethe at every word from Hindenburg or Ludendorf or Kaiser Willie."

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Benjy chuckled, despite himself.

"Willie—the English King's cousin! Willie and Georgie! Lord, 'tis more of a family squabble than a War!"

He sobered then.

"No, sor," Benjy said. "Cry havoc now and let loose the dogs of War!"

Sean stared, baffled.

"Tell me, boyo. If you loathe War so, why do you go at your little War game with such zest?"

"Why, because there's twins inside me, I suppose," Benjy replied, and press him as he might, Sean could elicit no more from the boy.

Sean's face sobered. He went off with a troubled mind to Dierdre in their goosedown bed. Lying there on his back he could hear Benjy singing an old war ditty—*The Charlie Chaplin Walk.* Sean's batman, a Nottinghamshire collier, had used to sing that before the Somme. Sean was drowsy but could not sleep. Yet soon he roused up wide-waking from the drowsiness. Was it thunder he heard out yonder in the night? And that flickering light across the sill of the back window. Was it heat lightning?

He stole from Deirdre's sound-sleeping side and stared out the rear window. A river fog lay waist deep upon the land. Among the tinted autumn trees the cold sweet light of fireflies came and went as though they were stars that could not make up their minds. Yet the flashes and flames that flickered beneath the cloak of mists on the black lot were not sweet, not cold.

Sean could hear the small smart chatter of machine guns. There were the blasts of howitzers and whizbangs and mortars. Above the shallow sea of leprous white mists the Aviatiks and Sopwith Strutters swooped and dove and immelmaned in dogfights.

Far to the rear Sean could see Benjy in his peejays, standing and watching. The child's wild face was grievous and weeping. He had flung out his spindly arms as if transcendentally to appease the madness to which he bore such suffering witness.

Sean crept shivering back into the bed. He lay awake, again thinking of Liam's great gift that had come to life, proliferated, and had now taken possession both of himself and Benjy.

And it went on thus. For another two weeks. Then one morning all was changed. Pale, half staggering from lack of sleep and haggard-eyed from poring over the war map thumbtacked to his

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play table beneath the gooseneck lamp's harsh circle of illumination, Benjy—almost faint—came down to breakfast all smiles.

"What does that Chessy cat grin on your face mean, boyo?" Sean asked.

"*C'est la guerre, mon vieux, c'est la guerre!*" cried Benjy. "But last night news came through—"

"*C'est la guerre* and so on," Deirdre intervened. "And what might that alien phrase mean to these poor untutored ears?"

" 'Tis French," Sean said. "That's War, old man, that's War."

"But now—tomorrow night at midnight—it will be over!" Benjy cried brightly.

"Tomorrow night and midnight be damned!" Sean exclaimed. "*Tonight* at midnight it shall end! I am unable to endure another night of it, and so I have determined to end it all meself! Benjy, I swear now by the holy martyred names of the Insurrection of Easter '16—Pearse, Casement, John Connolly, and the O'Rahilly—that I shall not let this thing possess the two of us for even one night more! I shall end it with me petrol and me lucifer at midnight tonight!"

"Lord save us, dads, you mustn't talk so!" cried Benjy. "Word has been flashed to all forces up and down the lines that the cease-fire is set for tomorrow's midnight. Already the gunfire is only token. Already the men crawl fearlessly over sandbags and under the barbed wire and march boldly into the midst of No Man's Land to embrace each other. They barter toffees and jars of Bovrils and tins of chocs for marzipan and *fastnacht krapfen* and strudels and *himbeer kuchen*! They show each other sweat-and-muck-smeared snapshots of mothers, sweethearts, and children back home. Men who a day ago were at each others' throats!"

Deirdre watched and listened, helpless, baffled, appalled.

"No matter to all the sweet sticky treacle of your talk!" Sean cried. "I'll not let this madness take possession of our home! So 'tis petrol and a lucifer to the whole game tonight at the strike of twelve! And a fiery fitting end to it all!"

"Bloody ballocks to that!" shouted Benjy, outraged.

"Go to your room, boy," Sean said, struggling to control himself. "We have man's words to say. Not words for the hearing of your mum."

A moment later Sean was strutting the length and breadth of Benjy's bedroom like a bloated popinjay. His swagger stick was in his hand; it seemed to give him back some of his old lost Valor,

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some long mislaid or time-rotted Authority. As he walked he slapped it in vainglorious bellicosity against his thigh.

Benjy watched him solemnly, sadly. "They'll not let you do this thing," he said. He paused. "Nor shall I."

Sean whirled, glaring.

"Ah, so it has come to that then!" he barked out in the voice of a glory-gutted martinet. " 'Tis they shan't and I shan't and you shan't, eh? Well, we shall see about that! I am King of this house. And I am King of all its environs!"

"No," Benjy said, his face above the war map tacked to his table. "You are no King. You are a King's Fool. Though lacking in a King's Fool's traditional and customary wisdom and vision."

Sean broke then. In a stride he crossed the room and slashed the boy across the face with the swagger stick.

A thin ribbon of blood coursed down from the corner of Benjy's mouth. A droplet of it splattered like a tiny crimson starfish or a mark on the map to commemorate some dreadful battle encounter.

"King, I say! King!" Sean was shouting, pacing the room again. There was a livid stripe across the child's cheek where the leather had fallen. But there was even more change in Benjy's face. And even something newer, something darker in the mind behind that face. The boy smiled.

"Come then," Benjy said softly. "Let us sit a while and tell sad stories of the Death of Kings."

The next day neither child nor father spoke nor looked each other in the eye. When occasionally they would be forced to pass in a corridor, it was in the stiff-legged, ominous manner of pit-bulls circling in a small seat-encircled arena. Dierdre, sensing something dreadful between them, was helplessly distraught. For what did she know of any of it, dear gentle Deirdre?

Benjy did not appear for supper. Sean ate ravenously. When he was done he drove his car into town and came back moments later with the three ten-gallon tins of petrol. He ranked them neatly alongside the black lot's border.

At nine Sean and Dierdre went to bed. For three hours Sean lay staring at the bar of harvest moonlight which fell across the carpet from the window sill to the threshhold of the bedroom door. Now and again half-hearted gunfire could be heard from the black lot. Soon Sean began speaking within himself a wordless colloquy. Fear had begun to steal upon him. Misgivings. He could not

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forget the Thing he had seen in the boy's face after the blow of the stiff, hardened leather. He could never forget the strange new timbre of the boy's voice when he spoke softly shortly after.

As the great clock in the hallway struck the chime of eleven thirty, Sean decided to forego the whole headstrong project. Let the cease-fire come in its ordained time. What could another twenty-four hours matter? There was scarcely any War waging in the black lot anyway. Cheered by his essentially craven decision he started, in his night shirt, down the hallway toward Benjy's room to inform him of his change of mind.

Within ten feet of the boy's bolted door Sean came to a standstill. He listened. It was unmistakable. The tiny quacking chatter of a voice speaking from a field telephone. And Benjy's murmurous voice giving orders back. Only one phrase caught Sean's ear. And that phrase set beads of sweat glistering on his face in the pallid gaslight of the long broad hallway. The words were in French. But Sean knew French.

"*On a besoin des assassins.*"

Sean felt a chill seize him, shaming the manhood of him. "We now have need of the assassins."

Shamed to the core of his soul, Sean fled back to the bedroom. With his one arm he turned the key in the door lock. With that same arm he fetched a ladder-back chair from against the wall and propped the top rung under the knob. Then he hastened to the bureau drawer where he kept the memorabilia of his old long-forgotten War and fetched out his BEF Webley.

The pistol was still well greased. It was loaded; the cartridge pins a little dark with verdigris but operable. Then Sean went and lay atop the quilt, shivering and clutching the silly, ineffectual pistol in his hand.

That was when he first heard them. Myriad feet; tiny footsteps and not those of small animals with clawed and padded paws. Boots. Tiny boots. The myriad scrape of microscopically small hobnails. Boots. By the thousands. By the thousands of thousands. And then abruptly above their measured, disciplined tread there burst forth suddenly the skirl of Royal Scots' Highlanders' bagpipes, the rattle of tiny drums, the piercing tweedle of little fifes, the brash impudence of German brass bands.

Deirdre still slept. Even the nights of the War in the black lot had never wakened her. It was to Sean's credit that he did not rouse her now. For, as never before in his life—not even in the

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inferno of First Ypres or the Somme—had he so craved the company of another mortal. A word. A touch. A look.

Abruptly, just beyond the door, there was a command followed by total silence. Sean chuckled. They were not out there. It had been a fantasy of his overwrought mind. A nightmare—a *cauchmare* as the French call it. But his tranquillity was short-lived. He heard a tiny voice in German crying orders to crank a howitzer to its proper angle of trajectory. Another shouted command. Sean sensed, with an old soldier's instinct, the yank of the lanyard. He heard the detonation, felt the hot Krupp steel barrel's recoil, saw flame flare as the shell blasted a ragged hole in the door where the lock had been.

The impact flung the door wide and sent the chair spinning across the moonlit carpet. And now, in undisciplined and furious anarchy, they swarmed across the door sill like a blanket of gray putrescent mud. Gone from them were the gay regimental colors, the spit-and-polish decorum of the morning of the great crate's arrival. Now they were muck-draped and gangrenous, unwashed and stinking of old deaths, old untended wounds. Some knuckled their way on legless stumps. Others hobbled savagely on makeshift crutches.

Sean sat up and emptied every bullet from the Webley into their midst. He might as well have sought to slaughter the sea with handfuls of flung seashells. All of them wore tiny gas masks. A shouted command and small steel cylinders on miniature wheeled platforms were trundled across the door sill and ranked before the bed. Another shout and gun crews of four men each wheeled in, to face the bed, behind the gas cylinders, ten Lewis and ten Maxim machine guns.

At a cry from the leader these now began a raking enfilade of Sean's body. He had but time to cross himself and begin a Hail Mary when the cocks of the little gas cylinders were screwed open and the first green cloud of gas reached his nostrils. Enveloped in a cloud of gas, the big man uttered one last choking scream and slid onto the carpet and into their very midst.

In a twinkling they swarmed over him like a vast shroud of living manure. They stabbed him with the needle points of their tiny bayonets, again and again. At last one of these sought out and found the big man's jugular vein. A shouted command again. The lift and fall of a bloody saber.

"All divisions—ri' tur'!"

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And to a man they obeyed.

"All divisions—'orm rank!"

Again they obeyed.

"All divisions—quick 'arch!"

And with pipers skirling, drums drubbing, fifes shrilling, and brass bands blaring they went the way they had come. The siege was a *fait accompli.*

Awakened by all the gunfire and clamor at last, and at the very moment of the door's collapse, Deirdre sat up, watching throughout. First in smiling disbelief, then in fruitless attempt to persuade herself that she was dreaming it all, then in acceptance, and, at last, in horror. Now as the first wisps of the chlorine stung her nostrils she went raving and irreversibly insane, sprang from her side of the bed, and hurtled through the side window, taking screen and all, to tumble onto the turf three feet below.

In the hushed autumn street of the night Deirdre, beneath the moon and the galaxies and the cold promiscuous fireflies, fled back into the hallucination of Youth returned. She raced up and down under the tinted trees. She twirled an imaginary pink lace parasol as if doing a turn on a small stage. She chanted the Harry Lauder and Vesta Tilley ballads from the music halls of her Dublin girlhood.

Wakened by all this daft medley of unfamiliar songs, Al Hugger, the nearest neighbor, took down his old AEF Springfield rifle and came to the house to discover what calamity had befallen it.

When, at last, he stood in the bedroom doorway, he looked first at the monstrous ruin which had been Sean, humped in his blood on the carpet by the bed. Then Hugger saw the blasé and unruffled figure of Benjy, clad only in his peejays and sitting straight as the blackthorn stick of a Connaught County squire in the ladder-back chair now back against the wall. Almost all the gas had been cleared from the room by the clean river wind which coursed steadily between the two open windows.

"No one," Hugger said presently—more to himself than to the child—"shall likely ever know what happened in this room tonight. Better they don't. Yes, I hope they don't. Never. For there is something about it all—something—"

Benjy yawned. Prodigiously. He smiled hospitably at Al Hugger. He looked at the thing—like a great beached whale—on the carpet by the bedside. He yawned again.

"*C'est la guerre, mon vieux, c'est la guerre,*" he said.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 447th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . the story of Rocky, a punchy ex-prizefighter, who is trusted by "the people from Vegas" because they know Rocky "will do exactly what he's told."

The author, William I. Smith, is in his early forties, single, and a freelance writer. He has degrees from the University of Denver in education, counseling and guidance, and library science, and for twelve years he taught the mentally retarded in Denver Public Schools. His writing so far includes articles and a book on education, children's articles and stories, and some light verse. His hobbies "center around fishing, ouzel watching, and other woodsy activities."

We like this man's background—he has stories to tell . . .

EVERYBODY CALLS ME ROCKY

by WILLIAM I. SMITH

All sorts of bad things are happening. Al and the people from Vegas are mad. Lola and Ray are running away and if Al and the people from Vegas find them I do not like to think what will happen. George should try to run away too, but it would not do him any good. He knows that and I do feel sorry for George because, you see, it really is all my doing.

The trouble is that people think I'm still stupid, but that's not true. It's just that I can't decide things any more. Big things like who to vote for or little things like what socks to wear.

So George tells me the big things and Mama tells me the little ones and I just do what they say. I always do what people say, not because I'm still stupid but, like I said, I can't decide things any more.

It used to be I could decide things. I decided to become a fighter. I won 30 out of 37 bouts. Only thing, it was the last seven I lost

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and I kept losing them worse and worse until they wouldn't let me fight any more.

So I went to work for George. I guess you should say I continued to work for George because he was my manager when I was fighting. Only not on paper, as they say, because George is a convicted felon and in our state they won't let convicted felons have anything to do with things as moral as the fight game.

My name is George too, but when I was fighting they called me Rocky—after Rocky Graziano because I fought like him—and with me working for George, naturally, everybody still calls me Rocky.

Dad, he worked for George too, doing more important things than I do because everybody said Dad was smart. He sure could make money. Really. He made the plates—engraving as they call it—and George handled the distribution, as he calls it. I've still got a special suitcase full of Dad's money and I pass some every once in a while, but only when Mama and I need something important, like food, because if George knew I was passing it he'd get mad and tell me to stop and then I'd have to.

Mama says George is a nice man and I should do as he says so he will keep taking care of us. Mama's near 90 now but she knows George isn't really a nice man. And I know George isn't really a nice man. But Mama doesn't know I know George isn't a nice man and it would be too hard to try and explain it to her, what with her not hearing so good any more. Besides, it's easier doing what George tells me and doing what Mama tells me.

Besides, George is pretty good to me. He won't let other people call me Dummy and he won't let anybody give me drinks, because if I drink I get like I was after my thirty-seventh fight, all mixed up and not knowing what I'm doing or where I am, sometimes for days at a time.

But I do wish George would pay me regular instead of slipping me a bill now and then. Then Mama and me, we'd know where we were and I wouldn't ever have to pass some of Dad's money from his special suitcase.

One thing I do for George is once every two or three months I drive to Vegas with a suitcase full of money. George tells me this has to do with legally accounting for the money, tax-wise and otherwise, but I'm not supposed to understand that. I'm only supposed to understand to take the money to Vegas and if anybody like the Feds should want to open the suitcase let them, because unless you know how to open the suitcase the right way every-

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thing in it will blow up in one great big whoosh and then, of course, you don't have any money.

But then again the Feds won't have any evidence and money's always what they call expendable, while people like George and the people in Vegas, they don't like to think of themselves as expendable. Of course I know how to open the suitcase the right way, but I'm not talking.

And George and the people in Vegas, they don't trust other people a whole lot, like not at all. But they do trust me because they know I'll do exactly what I'm told and because they think I'm too dumb to know what's what. So you see why I got to let people keep on thinking I'm still stupid, don't you?

Okay, so one day George he gives me the suitcase and tells me it's time to go to Vegas. So I take the money, stop off at my place, which is right across the street from George's Restaurant, to kiss Mama goodbye and pick up some things. Then I head on out to the lot in back of the restaurant where George's got the car parked I'm to drive to Vegas.

On the way out to the car Lola pops out of somewhere with a whole armful of packages and says George wants me to take her home. Now Lola's George's lady friend and he always says to do whatever she tells me. So I take her home even though I'm pretty sure he didn't tell her to tell me to do this, what with me having the money in the car and all.

Then when we get to that fancy apartment building where George rents a penthouse for Lola, Lola she's got all sorts of stuff she wants me to carry up to her penthouse. She tells me to leave that old suitcase in the car because I can't carry that too, along with all her packages. This isn't true because I'm real strong, but I do what Lola tells me, only I keep my eyes open while I'm carrying the packages and, sure enough, just before the elevator door closes on me and Lola and all her packages I see Ray.

Now, time to time, I see Ray with Lola and Lola says Ray's her brother, only he isn't. Or if he is he ought to be arrested for looking at her that way. So there I am with the elevator door closing on me and Lola and all her packages and I see him, just a glimpse, like he's waiting until the door is all the way closed before heading for where I left the car.

Sure enough, when I get back to the car and check the suitcase—which, by the way, I put down on the floor in the back seat so nobody'd be likely to see it unless they were looking for it

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before I helped Lola with all her packages—sure enough it's not the same suitcase. You'd have to look carefully to see the difference, but I look at everything carefully and I see the difference.

So to be sure, I drive off, park and hurry back real quick, quick enough to see Lola come scooting out the front door of her fancy apartment building and pile into a car driven by Ray. Off they go and there I stand, thinking about it.

Then off I go to take care of a few things. Pretty quick I come back and let myself into Lola's penthouse with a key I got without anybody knowing I got it.

Once I'm inside I head for that fancy bar, with the view of the city behind it, where George likes to sit with Lola those nights he can shake loose from Bonnie Jean, his wife.

At that fancy bar I pour myself out a full glass of the kind of Scotch that George always drinks and I start to swallow it down as fast as I can.

I remember choking on it a couple of times and the next thing I know George is slapping me in the face, yelling at me and asking me where the hell's Lola? I only moan and hold my head in my hands, which is all I really want to do, me not feeling too good at the time.

After a while George leaves off slapping me and starts talking just like I'm not there. "Gone," says George. "Lola's gone. Suitcase, money gone. Gone, gone, gone!" Then George starts cursing.

"Ease off, George. You're going nowhere with that." This is Al talking now. Still I don't look up, but even if I didn't recognize his voice I would have known it was Al because Al's the only one gets away with talking to George that way. "Stop crying and start thinking. Exactly what we got here?"

"We got one hundred thousand plus—missing," says George. "And this dummy here—"

"Stop me if I'm wrong, George," says Al, "but what we got here is your car illegally parked in front of your apartment—"

"Lola's apartment," says George.

"Excuse me," says Al. "Lola's apartment. *Your* Lola, in the apartment *you* pay the rent on, out in front of which sits *your* car. And in *your* car we don't find *your* special suitcase in which is lots and lots of money which is not yours, but is yours to take care of. Do you follow me, George?"

When George does not say anything Al says, "And, George, all this you say is the dummy's fault?"

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"She gave the dummy a drink and he took it," says George. "I told her not to give the dummy a drink, never to give the dummy a drink."

"Yes, George," says Al. "So now it is Lola's fault too."

"The suitcase will blow up and burn all the money," says George. "She don't know about that. So she won't get the money. Nobody will. It'll all burn up."

"You can't imagine what a comfort that is to me," says Al. Then I hear someone walking away and I hear a door open and close. Then after a long wait I hear a sigh. Then I hear George get up, for it was him doing the sighing. I stay there very still, with my head in my hands, because I am very much afraid George is going to shoot me.

But he doesn't. He only sighs again and then I hear him walking away. I hear a door close-and after a while I sigh.

I sit there for a while feeling very bad, but then I think about how George should not have let me fight those last seven fights and I feel better. Then I decide I will go home and count all my money.

I guess I lied to you, saying I couldn't decide things. I do have a lot of trouble deciding things. It is hard and I don't like to, so usually I don't. Almost never.

One thing I did decide, after I could think again after losing my thirty-seventh fight, I decided George owed me for letting me fight those last seven fights. Then, when George started trusting me to take the money to Vegas, I think maybe someday somebody is going to try and steal it.

At first I would take both suitcases to Vegas, the one with the real money in it and Dad's, which is exactly like the one with the real money in it, exactly like it, and which is filled with Dad's counterfeit money. I would put Dad's suitcase on the seat beside me and George's in the trunk, stuck up back of the spare tire where it is hard to see.

Then, if someone steals the suitcase on the seat, they will steal Dad's and when they open it all Dad's counterfeit money will burn up because, as I said, Dad's suitcase is exactly like George's. Then I will have George's suitcase full of real money and Mama and I will have lots of money and won't have to worry any more and no one will know we have it and everything will be all right.

Only it doesn't work. No one tries to steal the suitcase. Then

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George meets Lola and I can tell from the fact that I hear George tell Lola things he shouldn't and from the fact that Lola is Lola, that someone is going to steal the suitcase and pretty soon too.

So I change my plan a little. Figuring the stealing will take place around here, every time George gives me his suitcase to take to Vegas I first stop off at home to switch suitcases, leaving George's with the Vegas money at home and taking Dad's with me. Then I drive off and if Lola doesn't try to steal the suitcase, which she doesn't for a while, I come back and reswitch the suitcases and take the real money to Vegas.

And of course Mama doesn't hear me because, if you remember, Mama is awful deaf. And if anybody else sees or hears me coming back, which they never do, I can always say I forgot something and they will not think it strange because people expect me to forget things. Though people who know me well, like Mama, they know I never forget things.

So you see what happens. Lola—Ray really, but Lola told him to—stole the money and gave me yet another suitcase, which to my surprise is filled with counterfeit money. I guess Lola figures when the people in Vegas open the suitcase they will figure George is the one trying to cheat them.

Anyway Mama and I end up with lots of money, real money. Al and the people in Vegas lose lots of money, but I do not feel sorry for them because they can always get lots more. Lola and Ray end up with a burned-up suitcase and with Al and all the people in Vegas after them, but I do not feel sorry for Lola and Ray because they are not really nice people.

I am afraid George will end up gone because he made mistakes and Al and the people in Vegas they don't like people making mistakes with their money. I do feel sorry for George, but not very sorry because, you see, George he should not have let me fight those last seven fights. Even if I am not stupid any more, he should not have done that.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

It has happened again. Before we could publish William I. Smith's "Everybody Calls Me Rocky," his second story came in, and once again we give you an author's first and second stories in the same issue, back to back.

Mr. Smith's second story "goes West"—about a washed-up sheriff so shaky he couldn't even hold a gun, but who still had his wits about him . . .

REAL MAN

by WILLIAM I. SMITH

"Here, Sheriff," Henry Boughton said, pushing the coins on the table my way. "Buy yourself another drink."

I nodded my thanks as Boughton turned and walked out the swinging doors. A minute later I heard his horse galloping past the saloon, headed out the dusty road to the Boughton Ranch.

"Where is your pride?" Rosa came charging out from behind the bar. "You drink with anyone these days."

"I always did." Carefully I used both hands to pour my glass full of whiskey.

"*Si,* but this is different!" Angrily Rosa swept Boughton's coins off the table. "Then it was on your terms, but now it is on theirs. And to drink with the very man who replaced you as sheriff!"

Rosa made a mouth as if to spit on the floor where Boughton's money lay. But she didn't spit. In fact later, when she didn't think I was watching, she would pick up Boughton's money, every coin of it.

"Boughton replaced me," I said, "when I couldn't do my job any more. And rightfully so." I held up my hands, now so gnarled with age I could barely open them. "A sheriff who can't even hold a gun?" I shrugged.

"You never used a gun so much," Rosa said.

"No, but I always held the option of bein' able to use one. Then I lost the option."

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Rosa snorted. "For thirty years you were sheriff in this place. You gave everything, and now they give you nothing."

"They just gave me a drink."

Rosa eyed me carefully, deciding I was needling her, and went on to something else. "You know Ted Hardie's in town," she said.

"Yep."

"Do you know why?"

"To kill someone, I reckon. That's what he does for a livin'."

"And that no longer concerns you?"

"And that no longer concerns me."

"Do you know who he intends to kill?" Rosa sat down across from me.

"He hasn't been by to tell me yet."

"Oh, yes, *si,* you have the great respect for Mr. Ted Hardie, do you not?" Rosa made the face of one having the great respect.

"I respect his ability," I said. "And I never went up against him because he was faster on the draw."

This brought Rosa up short. After a moment's thought she went at it from another direction. "But you handled him," she said.

"Yes, I handled him."

"Well, I got news for you. Your fine Mr. Henry Boughton has hired him to kill the schoolteacher. And do you know why?"

"No, but I'm about to find out."

"Humph!" Rosa was using up a week's worth of snorting in one morning. "So, yes, I will tell you why, though I do not know why I will tell you why. I do know it is something a real man would do something to stop."

"Why has Boughton brought Ted Hardie in to kill the schoolteacher?" I asked.

"You know Lupe Vargas?" Rosa asked.

"No."

"She is a good woman. She and the schoolteacher, they have an affection for each other. They plan to marry."

"And Lupe Vargas is Boughton's town woman," I said when Rosa didn't continue. "And Boughton doesn't like people takin' what belongs to him. So Boughton brings in Ted Hardie to call out the schoolteacher and kill him."

"So you remember who Lupe Vargas is," Rosa said.

"I know who Lupe is. I never heard the Vargas before."

"Lupe is a good woman," Rosa said.

To Rosa a good woman is one who goes regularly to mass, tries

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not to hurt others needlessly, and otherwise does what she must to preserve herself. Not a bad definition.

"I am going upstairs for a while." Rosa stood up. "I only say, this is wrong—Boughton hiring the death of another for such a reason. I only say a *real man* would find a way to stop such a thing."

Upstairs means the sitting room where Rosa has her religious pictures and such. This is the one room I never enter. I watched her shut the door and thought about how there would be no problem if only the schoolteacher had a little sense.

Ted Hardie never kills anyone he can't goad into drawing first. That's why he never killed me. But the schoolteacher is a fool. He spends as much time as Rosa thinking about what a real man should do. He would draw first and Hardie would kill him.

The next morning I went out. I can still walk: I just hate people seeing me shuffling along the way I have to. I was shaking so bad when I got back that Rosa had to pour my first drink.

"Well?" she asked when I had it down.

"Wait an' see," I said.

Three days later Ted Hardie left town without killing anyone.

"Well?" Rosa asked again that afternoon.

"Well what?" I poured myself another drink.

"What did you do to make Ted Hardie leave town?"

"Nothing."

"Oh?" Rosa raised her eyebrows. "Where did you go the other morning?"

"To talk to the schoolteacher."

"What did you talk about?"

"I suggested he pay Ted Hardie five hundred dollars to kill Boughton if—and only if—Hardie killed the teacher first."

Rosa thought a moment and chuckled. "And if the teacher remained alive, Hardie was to keep the five hundred dollars anyway?"

"That was the arrangement."

"And Boughton, he hears about this arrangement and decides to cancel his, how you say, preview arrangement."

"*Previous* arrangement," I corrected. "Also Hardie no doubt keeps his fee from Boughton for killing the schoolteacher, as he only failed to carry out his end of the bargain because Boughton canceled the order."

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"Oh, yes!" Rosa threw back her head and laughed till tears came.

"But wait." She stopped abruptly and wiped her eyes. "How does the schoolteacher have five hundred dollars? That is a lot of money."

"He is a very saving schoolteacher."

"But five hundred dollars—that saving?"

"Three hundred dollars—that saving. I gave him the other two hundred dollars."

"But—"

"Your money, Rosa. You shouldn't mind," I said. I finished my drink, leaned back, and folded my hands on the table. "After all, it's the least a real woman could do."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

A MATTER OF COURSE

by MARK GRENIER

The Black Widowers probe to uncover a cad,
So that others will not lose their shirts.
When, at last, they ask Henry what he'd like to add,
He replies with a smile, "Just desserts."

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a *NEW* short story by
JOYCE HARRINGTON

Let's group three regular contributors to EQMM—Patricia Highsmith, Ruth Rendell, and Joyce Harrington. What do they have in common? First, the three are excellent writers. Second, they are all women. Third, all three offer "something special" to mystery readers—each her own special "quality." And fourth, they write a certain type of suspense story that could be described as "stories that might happen to you"—because you can identify with the main characters and easily conceive of yourself in the situations or predicaments that these particular writers imagine. Joyce Harrington's newest story is that kind of story—plus. The plus is a reminder to us that all that glisters is not gold, or to go back further and perhaps be more apt, appearances are deceptive . . .

THE COUPLE NEXT DOOR

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

The new couple next door was young and the girl was pregnant. It rained the day they moved in, a fine gentle mist, and as the girl trudged in and out of the building she raised her face to the wetness, her round eyes blinking and her blonde hair lank and straggling. Her husband dashed back and forth with his head lowered and his shoulders hunched, carrying chairs and boxes. They carried the large rolled mattress for the double bed between them.

The rented truck was soon emptied—they had few possessions—and the young husband drove it away. Carmela left the window and listened to the bumping and scraping sounds that came clearly through the shared walls.

"That's all I need," she complained into the telephone. "An infant screaming all night long. I'm on my feet all day and I need my

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sleep at night. And I'm sure I saw them bring in a hi-fi. I hope you told them not to play it after ten o'clock. I can't think why you rented to them in the first place. They look unreliable."

The landlord gave Carmela no satisfaction. "They paid cash—a month's rent and two months' security. Anything else, Miss Jade?"

Carmela slammed down the phone and immediately began to dial again.

"Their furniture looks like thrift shop junk. He has long hair and a beard. She was walking around in the rain as if she were dreaming or doped or something. I tell you, I feel sorry for that baby. But what can I do?"

"You have a good heart, Carmela," her friend said. "Listen. I can't talk right now. Got to do some shopping. See you at work on Monday."

Carmela went into the bathroom and under the fluorescent light probed the roots of her glossy black hair. Were there more gray hairs than last time? She put on an old stained smock and a pair of rubber gloves. She mixed the dye in a plastic bottle with a long spout and began applying it to the gray roots.

While she worked, she heard the shower in the next-door bathroom start running. The bathrooms were back to back. She heard splashing and laughter, a high squealing laugh and a deeper more resonant chuckle. There were words, too, but the intervening wall and the sound of the rushing water robbed the words of sense. Carmela listened closely but could make out nothing of what was being said.

In the mirror her face under the muddy cap of black dye looked bare and strained. As a girl, her black hair, blue eyes, and pale skin had made her proud and demanding. She had dreamed of a handsome professional man, a doctor or lawyer, who would carry her away. None of her local suitors had quite filled the bill, and one by one they had married other less-demanding girls.

Carmela told herself she had no regrets. She was still as slender as a girl, but sometimes her shoulders sagged. The pale skin around her blue eyes was loose and puffy; tiny creases surrounded her lips, and the skin of her neck, under close scrutiny, was reddish and crêpy. She gazed into the mirror and listened to the laughing and splashing from next door.

"Disgusting," she said.

She went into the kitchenette and lit the oven. While she

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waited for the hair dye to do its work, she began making an applesauce cake.

The girl, breathless and rosy, turned the shower off.

"Dry my back, Dougie," she said.

"You look like you swallowed a watermelon."

"He's kicking. Put your hand right here."

"You must think I love you or something. Crazy broad!"

"Isn't it nice to have a shower? When I think of that crummy old bathtub! I like this place, Dougie. And the washing machines in the basement. No more launderette. And the little room for the baby. Oh, it's going to be perfect!"

"Well, put some clothes on, Big Mama. We still have work to do."

"Slave driver!"

"We have to put the bed together."

"One-track mind!" She climbed into a baggy pair of jeans and put on one of his old shirts. "Oh, Dougie, did you notice the lady watching us from the window? All the time we were unloading the truck, she stood there watching us. She looked like a witch. Right next door. Did you see her?"

"Nope. Come on. Let's get crackin'. I have to go out tonight."

"Oh, Dougie!" Disappointment dragged at her voice. "Tonight?"

"Yeah. And see if you can find my gun. I put it in one of those boxes."

Together they fumbled the bed frame into position. It occupied most of the bedroom. There was room for the dresser and an old high-backed rocking chair. Somewhere, in one of the boxes, was a cushion for the chair, a patchwork cushion the girl had bought at an Appalachian crafts festival because it reminded her of stories her mother had told her of the old days. She would have bought a quilt for the bed, but there wasn't enough money. There was never enough money. Together they heaved spring and mattress onto the frame.

The girl sat panting on the edge of the mattress. Her face was broad, round, and flattish, with a short upturned nose. Across this nose and the wide cheekbones a band of freckles stood out, glowing against her sudden pallor. She laid a hand on top of the mound of her stomach and took cautious sips of air, as if she were listening intently to some inner happening and was afraid of disturbing it with normal breathing.

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"You okay, Karen?"

"Yes. I think I am." She answered tentatively, waiting for the true answer to be revealed. "Yes, I think everything is okay."

"You've had a rough day, Big Mama. Why don't you lie down for a while?" He sat beside her and stroked her long blonde hair, tucking damp strands of it behind her ears.

She laid her head back and his arm tightened around her. She sighed deeply, her breath warm and moist against his neck.

"I'm all right, Dougie. I was just a little out of breath. Everything's really all right." As if to confirm this, color flooded back into her cheeks, and she kissed him lightly, reassuringly. "If you're going out, I'd better fix something to eat."

"Oh, hey, listen. Don't do that. I can get something on the way."

"Well, I'm hungry, too. And I really have to unpack that kitchen stuff."

She went to the door and looked back at the room—the bare mattress, the battered suitcases and heap of cartons in the corner, the uncurtained window. And her husband sat on the bed, watching her. Soon, she thought, soon I'll have it fixed up. I'll get new curtains and a soft fleecy rug for the floor. Soon we'll have enough money to get some nice things. Especially for the baby.

"I'd feel terrible if I let you go out tonight without any supper," she said. "Suppose something happens to you."

"Nothing's going to happen. I'm always careful. I've got to get ready. Frank's picking me up at seven thirty."

In the kitchen Karen unpacked a frying pan and a couple of plates. She found some bacon, eggs, and a loaf of bread. There was no milk; they would have to drink their instant coffee black. Tomorrow she would go shopping. While the bacon sizzled, she went into the living room and rummaged through the boxes there.

The early evening sunlight broke through the gray drizzle, sending a final golden shaft through the window, then faded into purple twilight. Karen plugged in a table lamp and set it on top of one of the hi-fi speakers. The hi-fi was new, a present from Doug. To keep her company, he said, when he was out late and she waited up for him. She had a growing collection of country-Western records. But she wouldn't have its company tonight. She didn't know where to put the hi-fi in this new room, and Dougie probably wouldn't have time to hook it up until tomorrow. Well, she could plug in the television in the bedroom and lie in bed watching it until he came home.

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In the third box Karen opened she found the gun. It lay nestled in a neatly folded stack of new baby clothes, its hard blue-black contours shockingly bold against the soft whiteness of the little gowns and shirts. When Karen picked it up, it left its impression on the fabric beneath. Somehow it hurt to see the baby's clothes bearing that harsh imprint. She felt a vague sense of spoiled innocence and wanted to ask Doug why he had put the gun into that particular box.

But the bacon was now sputtering and smelled strongly of hot grease. She put the gun down on top of one of the boxes where she knew he would see it, then hurried into the kitchen.

They ate fried egg sandwiches and crisp bacon—she'd saved it just in time—and drank black coffee. They spoke of the chores they would have to do tomorrow, settling into the new apartment. Karen always avoided thinking and speaking of what Doug did when he went out at night. By tacit agreement he never spoke of his nocturnal activities. At first he had tried to assure her that he was hardly ever in danger. But she refused to believe this, so he found it best not to speak of it at all. So far he had always come home safely.

The doorbell rang just as they were finishing their coffee. Doug looked at his watch.

"Must be Frank. He's a little early."

While Doug went to answer the door, Karen cleared away the few dishes. She was surprised to hear him call her.

"Karen, we have a visitor."

She dried her hands on her jeans—the towels had not yet been unpacked—and went, wondering, to the door.

"Oh," she said, "hello."

"Hello," said the woman in the doorway. "I'm your next-door neighbor, Carmela Jade. I hope you won't think I'm being pushy or nosy. I happened to notice you were moving in today, and I knew you wouldn't have time to do much cooking. So I brought you this cake. Just being a good neighbor."

Karen's eyes flitted from the cake on its cut-glass plate, to the woman's face, to Doug lurking behind the door and frankly grinning through his beard.

"Of course I would like to have the cake plate back," the woman went on. "But take your time about it. I'm right next door, apartment 2B. Been there for fifteen years. This has always been a quiet building. I hope you enjoy living here. Anything I can do

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to help you, just let me know. I believe in being a good neighbor."

"Thank you, Mrs. Jade." Karen was very conscious of the woman's sharp blue eyes searching past her into the apartment. "It's a beautiful cake."

"It's Miss, but you can call me Carmela. I hope we'll be friends. The last people who lived in this apartment were very good friends of mine. A nice quiet couple, no children." The woman's eyes rested briefly on Karen's bulging middle. "What did you say your name was?"

"I'm Karen. And my husband is Doug. Fletcher." As Karen stepped forward to take the cake from Carmela Jade's outstretched hands, the woman gave an involuntary shudder, blinked rapidly, and backed off a few paces into the hallway.

"I'd ask you to come in for a cup of coffee," Karen said, "but we're still in such a mess."

"Some other time," the woman stammered. She shoved the cake into Karen's hands and fled down the hall to her own apartment. "Nice meeting you," she called over her shoulder. The door slammed behind her, and Doug and Karen could clearly hear the ramming home of several locks.

"What was that all about?" Karen wondered. "Did I say something scary?"

"Beats me. Is she the one you saw watching from the window?"

Karen nodded. "Um-mmm. Oh, Dougie, did you dig that hairdo? And about a ton of makeup. She looked like an aging geisha girl. But I wonder what made her take off like that."

"Be kind, Big Mama. Not everybody's as naturally beautiful as you. Are you gonna cut that cake or just admire it? I've just got time for a piece of cake before I meet Frank downstairs."

He picked up the gun from the top of the box. Karen went into the kitchen with the cake. She heard the sharp clicking sounds that meant he was checking out the gun, loading it from the handful of cartridges he always kept in the pocket of his old Army jacket. She turned on the water to drown the sounds. It was decent of him to meet Frank downstairs. Frank made her nervous. She was intimidated by his huge greasy bulk and his beady suspicious eyes, even though Doug had told her that Frank was a good man to be with in this night work, street-wise and cunning, never taking unnecessary risks. Frank wasn't married, and he made her feel like excess baggage.

When she came out of the kitchen with two slices of cake, the

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gun had disappeared. She knew it was in the bulging right-hand pocket of the fatigue jacket. She put the knowledge from her mind and munched the applesauce cake. It was spicy and full of raisins.

"Good cake," said Doug. "You'll have to get her recipe."

"If I don't scare her to death. I wish I knew what made her run off like that."

"Got to go now. You get some rest. I made the bed for you."

"Thanks. I guess I'll do some unpacking first."

"Don't work too hard. And lock the door behind me. Can't be too careful these days."

"But I *can't* come over now, Carmela. I'm in the middle of getting dressed. I have a date with Walter. What are you so nervous about, anyway?"

Carmela Jade whispered into the phone. "It's my new neighbors. They're crooks, drug addicts. I'm sure of it. She's a shifty-eyed little tramp. Pretending to be married, but I doubt it. And he was grinning at me like a wolf through that awful beard. There's something very wrong about them."

"Carmela. Stop imagining things. You're making something out of nothing."

"I am *not* imagining things. They have a gun. I saw it. Scared me half to death. And now he's gone out. He met this terrible-looking thug in front of the building and they went off together. Probably to murder innocent people in their beds and rob them of everything they own."

"Well, if he's gone off to murder someone else, he isn't going to be bothering you. Relax, Carmela, have a drink, watch television, get out your knitting. Anything, just get your mind off them. I've got to go now. Walter'll be along any minute."

"I never drink, I don't watch television, and I wouldn't be caught dead knitting. And I don't know why you go out with that Walter. He's nothing, a shoe salesman. You can do better than that."

"No, I can't. And neither can you. At least I get out once in a while and have a little fun. I don't sit home inventing murderers. Do you want to come out with us? Walter has a friend. We can pick you up."

"Thanks, but no thanks. Any friend of Walter's couldn't possibly be worth my time. And if I don't show up at work on Monday,

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you'll know it's because I've been murdered in my own apartment by those freaks next door."

"Stop exaggerating, Carmela! Lock the door. I've got to go now."

"It is locked. Yale lock, chain lock, and police lock."

"Goodbye, Carmela. Have a nice night."

"Wait. Don't go yet—" Her voice was slammed back at her by the empty line.

She looked around her apartment. Reclining lounge chair to soothe her aching legs and feet after the long days at the department store, days that seemed to get longer as the years went by; the three-piece suite, carefully saved for and scarcely used; coffee table with magazines precisely arranged to display their titles; shelves with knick-knacks; her collection of china dogs of nearly every breed. A real dog would make messes and have to be walked. It was all perfect, just the way she wanted it, and perfectly neat. Visitors seldom came, and there were no relatives with noisy dirty children. For no apparent reason Carmela felt like crying.

She walked purposefully into the kitchenette. No chores to be done there. The mixing bowl, cake pan, and the remains of her own small supper had long since been tidied up. With an almost absent-minded air she opened a cupboard. Her hand, with its long, strong, red-painted fingernails, snaked its way unerringly to the space behind the oatmeal carton.

The bottle was about half full. Years ago, how many she did not care to dwell on, she had been in the habit of mixing the vodka with tomato juice. She had long forgotten who had introduced her to Bloody Marys—one of that unending stream of unsuitable suitors, no doubt. The stream had dried up; only the habit remained. But all that tomato juice had given her heartburn. The vodka on its own merits was much nicer. And quicker.

She poured half a tumblerful and dropped in two ice cubes. The oily liquid gleamed invitingly in the glass, purer than water and far more quenching to the parched and thirsty soul. But before Carmela would allow herself even one sip, she stowed the bottle away in its dark hiding place and wiped the counter clean of any possible spots.

She carried the glass into the living room, settled into her reclining chair, and with the remote control switch in one hand, the glass in the other, took her first sip while tuning the television to any program that would engage her interest and take her mind

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off the problem of the couple next door. Occasionally, in the quieter moments between car chases, shootouts, and commercial breaks, she heard thumps and patterings from the apartment next door. Probably stowing away a whole arsenal, she thought—rifles, hand grenades, Molotov cocktails. What if they were members of some lunatic liberation army? The whole building might go up in one earthshaking blast. It could happen!

Carmela groaned and eased herself out of the recliner. Might as well go to bed for all the comfort she got from television. She refilled her glass, then meticulously performed the bedtime ritual she had never once neglected in all her adult life. She creamed her face, brushed her teeth, wrapped her head in a satin turban to protect her hairdo. She massaged lotion into her hands, then put on a pair of white cotton gloves to keep the lotion working all night.

All this done, she shook into one gloved hand a single red and blue capsule. The vial was almost empty. The capsule looked so cheery, bright blue and vibrant red, and electric violet where the two ends overlapped. She must remember to get the prescription refilled. It wouldn't do to get caught some night without a cheery pill to blot out the long uneventful day. Carmela popped it into her mouth and washed it down with a mouthful of vodka.

Propped against two ruffled pillows, Carmela flipped the pages of a magazine while waiting for sleep to free her mind of the probable past and future iniquities of the brazen couple next door. The magazine, usually much concerned with 101 ways to cook hamburger and the problems of a certain movie-star princess and her teen-aged daughter, featured an article on how, or indeed whether, to protect yourself against rape. Carmela sipped her vodka and read of knees applied with a swift upward motion, of biting, gouging, scratching, of heels or heavy wooden wedgies ground into insteps, and finally, of the probability of winding up either victorious or dead if you tried it at all. She hadn't considered the neighboring threat in this light at all, but anything was possible with that kind.

At last she felt the approach of the lovely gray fog. Her eyelids grew heavy and her jangled nerves relaxed. The words on the page ceased to make sense and she dropped the magazine to the floor and switched off the bedside lamp. For a moment all was silent in the darkened room. Carmela drifted . . .

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Then a burst of sound through the intervening wall jolted her wide-awake. What on earth was going on next door? Scarcely moved in and having a wild party already? Carmela envisioned unspeakable activities just beyond her bedroom wall. But when she sat up to rearrange her pillows, she recognized the sound for what it was. The television in the next apartment was blaring forth the eleven o'clock news.

She raised her gloved fist to thump a reprimand on the wall. But then, fearing reprisal, she drew back her hand. The landlord would certainly hear about this in the morning! Let him deal with it. That was his job. He was responsible for renting the apartment to dangerous young criminal types. If anybody was going to get shot at, let it be him. No telling what those two would do if they were crossed.

But in the meantime what was *she* to do? Her head ached and her eyes burned, but the droning of the television kept her just on the edge, would not let her fall asleep. Another pill? Maybe that would do it. She staggered into the bathroom, shook another cheery pill into her white glove, and downed it with a mouthful of water from the tap. Then back to bed. In twenty minutes or so Carmela slept, mouth open, her satin turban slightly askew, her gloved hands clenched beneath the coverlet.

Beyond the wall the television murmured of love and intrigue and other late-late movie subjects . . .

A brazen gong rang and the gun in Carmela's hand went off with a thud, thud, thud.

"You're doing it wrong. Do it again."

Once more the gong. And the gun went off, but Carmela couldn't get her finger on the trigger. If she could only find the trigger, she could make it stop. Her hand felt numb.

"Again, Miss Jade. Again, again, again, Miss Jade."

A disembodied male voice issued its commands and she had to obey.

The gong echoed and the gun kept firing. It was firing at a store mannequin and hitting it every time. The mannequin's head fell off.

"Miss Jade! Miss Jade!"

Thud, thud, thud.

Carmela opened her eyes on blackness. Someone was calling her name and banging on her door. The doorbell pealed. The

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luminous hands of the alarm clock dazzled and swam so that she could not tell what time it was.

"Coming . . . I'm coming . . . just a minute."

She groped for the bedside lamp, while the knocking and shouting continued. Her gloved hands fumbled with the switch, and all her movements seemed sluggish and clumsy. At last she managed to light the lamp. She blinked away the last vestige of sleep and looked again at the clock.

Three thirty! In the morning! Who could be knocking at the door and calling her name? What would the neighbors think? Oh, the neighbors! She remembered who her new neighbors were, and her lips pressed thin against each other.

"Be quiet!" she muttered. "I'm coming."

She crawled out of bed and found her robe. Knotting the belt, she lurched through the darkened living room to the door.

"Who is it?" she whispered to the closed and thrice-locked door.

"Miss Jade? It's me. Doug Fletcher. I need your help. It's Karen."

"At this hour of the morning?"

"Miss Jade, please. I'm sorry to wake you up," came the shaking voice from the other side of the door. "I need to use your telephone. We don't have one yet."

Carmela paused with her hand on the police lock. It could be a trick to get into the apartment. Once she let him in, she'd be alone and defenseless while he had a gun and could do what he liked with her. She could tell him to leave his gun at home, but then he'd know that she knew. No! That would never do.

"Miss Jade? Are you there?"

"There's a bar down the street. Don't they have a phone?"

"I've already been there. It's closed. Miss Jade, I think Karen's going to have the baby. Please let me use your phone."

"Just a minute."

Carmela hurriedly made a circuit of the living room, turning on every lamp, even the overhead fixture she never used because of its glare. She returned to the door, took a deep breath, and unlocked the police lock. She slid its long steel bar out of the groove and held it in her hand while she unlocked the Yale lock. She left the chain lock in place and opened the door the few inches it allowed. She peered through the slit at the distraught figure in the dimly lit hall.

Doug Fletcher was not a reassuring sight. His eyes were red-

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rimmed and he sagged with fatigue. Or drug-induced lethargy—Carmela could not be sure which. He wore a disreputable Army jacket and faded jeans. He supported himself with one hand pressed against the door jamb, and Carmela was very much aware of the strength and menace that could be lurking in his square blunt fingers. Why, he could strangle her before she could make a sound. Every day the newspapers told of women being beaten, stabbed, strangled for a few dollars or for no reason at all.

"Why don't you ask the landlord? He's got a phone."

"I tried. He doesn't answer the door. You're the only other person I know here. Please, Miss Jade! I just need to call the doctor and a taxi. Karen—she's—I think she overdid it today. The baby's not due for another month, but she's having—pains."

"Well. All right. Just a minute."

Carmela closed the door again and unlocked the chain lock. She swung the door wide to allow the young man to pass.

"Leave the door open," she said. "The phone's over there." She indicated a low table and small chair against the wall.

"Thanks, Miss Jade. I'm really sorry to wake you up in the middle of the night. Now where's that phone number?" He began groping in his pockets as he shambled across the room.

Carmela remained by the door, watching him closely. Maybe she had misjudged him. Babies often did come in the middle of the night, at least in the magazine stories she read. And young husbands were always ten times more upset by their coming than the brave young wives.

Carmela's imagination leaped to the days ahead when she would offer her mature advice to the inexperienced young parents. Perhaps with a baby to set an example for, Karen and Doug could be induced to improve their own appearance. Carmela felt like a benign conspirator in the shaping of three lives. Her fears had been foolish. Her new neighbors were just young and ignorant. She prepared her face to smile and offer to sit with Karen until the taxi arrived.

At the telephone table Doug began unloading his pockets.

"I know it was here," he muttered. Carmela was about to point out the telephone directory when she saw the gun in his right hand. In an instant she felt the terrible wrench of betrayal. She had been right all along! He was here to threaten and rob her! Maybe even to kill her!

His back was still turned to her. Quickly, before he could turn

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around, before the gun was pointed at her, she had to protect herself. Fear, rage, and self-vindication lent her strength.

She rushed forward with the steel bar of the police lock clutched in both white-gloved hands. She brought it down on the back of his head with more force than she thought she could muster. He crumpled silently to the floor.

She picked up the phone and, after several fumbling attempts at dialing, managed to get connected with the police.

"I have just apprehended an armed robber," she stated. She responded calmly to the unemotional voice at the other end of the line, giving her name, address, and the particulars of her adventure.

It wasn't until she put down the phone that reaction set in. Her legs felt queer and her stomach fluttered wildly. She sank into the recliner and pressed both hands over her eyes. She wanted desperately to know if the young man lying on the floor was dead or alive, but she couldn't bear to look at him let alone touch him. She was still in the recliner when sirens wailed and tall men in uniform began to fill her living room.

Several of them clustered around the body on the floor, hiding it from view, while another sat beside Carmela and questioned her. Earnestly Carmela told of her suspicions, of the trick played on her to gain access to her apartment. of the gun being drawn and her instant stroke of self-defense. She felt calm and heroic. She would be written up in the newspapers.

Out of the whispered consultation over the body one man raised his head and addressed her questioner.

"Hey, know who this is?"

"A known criminal, I have no doubt," said Carmela.

"Not exactly, lady." He read from an open wallet in his hand. "Douglas Martin Fletcher. Badge Number 17582. Plainclothes. Narco Squad."

The man who had been questioning her turned and looked at her with stony eyes. Carmela felt bewildered.

"A policeman?" she quavered. "Is he—?"

"You guessed it, lady. Nice going."

More men arrived—men in rumpled suits and in the white jackets of ambulance attendants. Carmela lay ignored in her recliner while their voices rumbled over her head. In a sudden hush she followed their eyes to the door. A small voice pierced the stillness.

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"I heard the siren. Did Dougie call an ambulance? I don't think I can wait much longer."

Carmela had just a momentary view of the pale freckled face, intense and anxious in the doorway, before Karen was surrounded by a protective phalanx of broad blue shoulders and swept away.

Her questioner returned.

"Better get dressed, lady. You'll have to come with us."

"Yes. Of course. May I make a phone call first?"

"Okay. But make it fast."

Carmela went to the extension phone in the bedroom. She stripped off her white gloves and dialed the familiar number. The phone buzzed many times before she heard the answering click.

"Hello?" the voice was blurred with sleep.

"I won't be in the store on Monday. Something has come up."

"You had to call me *now*? Carmela, you're really crazy."

"Maybe I am. Read the newspaper if you want to know why."

"What happened? What's going on?"

Carmela replaced the receiver. She felt an odd lightness, a sense of walking on a strange new path. Maybe she would never have to go back to the store again. From her closet she took her best black dress. She sat at her dressing table and began making up her face. Good thing she'd done her hair today. There might be photographers.

"Q"

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HUGH PENTECOST

The partnership of Jason Dark, avenger, and Sharon Evans, his right hand, versus Quadrant International, an industrial octopus whose tentacles reach out to every crook and cranny in the world—in the Adventure of the Five Thousand Fruit Trees . . .

THE DARK MANEUVER

by HUGH PENTECOST

"What would you do now if you were Mr. Big?" the girl asked.

Jason Dark looked at her, curled up in the corner of the sofa, her head against his shoulder, her cool fingers reaching up to touch his cheek. He bent his head slightly to brush his lips against her gold-blonde hair. How young the heart stays, he thought. He was 53 years old, his sandy hair graying at the temples. She was 25, perhaps 26. He could have been her father.

By some miracle she had fallen in love with him, had come to live with him. He was short, on the stout side, wearing slightly tinted wire-rimmed glasses. He was no Don Juan. Young men whistled, at least figuratively, when they saw Sharon Evans. She was lush, she was alive, she was eager, and unbelievably, she was his.

"If I were Mr. Big I would not take it lying down," Dark said.

"So what would you do—standing up?"

She stroked his hand, the right hand that was covered by a black glove. It was really not a hand at all, only a plastic imitation. He couldn't feel the touch of her fingers, but he saw them. Instinctively, when they talked of Mr. Big, the black-gloved hand could not be forgotten. Mr. Big was responsible for it.

"How do you add it up?" Dark asked. He admired the way her

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bright, inquisitive mind worked. More than once she had pointed the way to him in a sticky situation. He had been a cop for 22 years, a private investigator for five. He was trained to deal with violence. And yet this girl, who had never dreamed of violence until she met Jason Dark, had an instinct, an intuition, for dealing with the techniques of violence.

The man they called Mr. Big—because they didn't know his real name—was a master at unbelievable violence. It was Mr. Big who had ordered two men to trap Jason Dark in a deserted restaurant kitchen. It was Mr. Big who had ordered torture and mutilation if Jason Dark refused what Mr. Big wanted. The two men had strapped Jason Dark's right hand to the butcher's block, broken all the bones in it with the flat side of a cleaver, and then, when Dark still refused, chopped it to ribbons with the blade edge.

Dark could still feel cold sweat running down his back when he thought of it. He had only one purpose left in life—to destroy Mr. Big. Not just the man himself, but the empire over which he presided. That empire was known to the public as Quadrant International, one of the three largest multinational corporations in the world.

Mr. Big would have been sardonically amused if someone had told him that one man, a 53-year-old ex-cop with a plastic hand, was planning the total destruction of Quadrant International. It was a Walter Mitty daydream. But Jason Dark dreamed it, and he had already kicked a few holes in the bottom of Mr. Big's boat.

"So let's add it up," Sharon said. She began to tick off items on her slender fingers. "For some years Mayfield Aeronautics, a subsidiary of Quadrant, has been selling fighter planes to a certain Arab nation. Annual profits to Quadrant of tens of millions of dollars. Suddenly and without warning the ruler of that Arab nation turns over his order for planes to Crampton, a rival and competitor of Quadrant's. Not only will the future profits go to Crampton, but millions of dollars' worth of Quadrant planes are stacked up somewhere with no one to buy them. Not only is this a serious economic blow to Mr. Big but it does enormous damage to his image as one of the most powerful men in the world. He has been outwitted, outmaneuvered. As you say, he isn't going to take it lying down."

"So what does he do?" Dark asked, his fingers entwined in her gold-blonde hair. "Find another buyer for his planes?"

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"Not good enough," Sharon said. "The loss of the money is the smallest part of the damage to Mr. Big."

"So what would you advise Mr. Big to do?" Dark asked. He smiled at her, the tender smile of the indulgent parent for a precocious child. He didn't feel at all parental toward her, but the image was one he couldn't avoid.

Sharon's eyes were very bright. "If I were Mr. Big," she said, "I would arrange for the overthrow of the government of that Arab nation. I would install my own people, and I would tell Crampton to go peddle its planes somewhere else."

Dark looked at her, his eyes widened behind the tinted glasses. "You'd overthrow a government?"

"Why not?" Sharon asked. "Corporations have done it before."

Dark shook his head slowly. "You know something, love? I'm awfully glad you're on my side," he said.

"The climate, at the moment," Maclyn said, "is highly moral, Jason."

Maclyn was in the State Department. On a trip to New York he had called his old friend Jason Dark and they were lunching together at Willard's Back Yard, a fancy restaurant in the East Fifties. Dark was having shad roe and bacon, and a green salad. Maclyn was having a baby Maine lobster with fried onion rings. Both items cost an arm-and-a-leg at Willard's Back Yard, but Willard helped take away the pain by preparing and cooking them mangificently.

The two men shared a bottle of Chablis. Dark had asked his friend Maclyn a question which had resulted in the comment about a highly moral climate.

"Watergate plus Senate investigations of the C.I.A. have made the overthrowing of foreign governments very unpopular," Maclyn said.

"A friend suggested to me," Dark said, "that the only way Quadrant International could recoup the loss of its airplane contracts with a certain Arab country was to overthrow the government and put in its own people."

"It certainly would be a way," Maclyn said cautiously. He worked on his last lobster claw with the skill of a surgeon. "But big corporations are walking very light these days, Jason. Overthrowing foreign governments would not be viewed with favor. As I say, the climate at the moment is highly moral."

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"But how would Quadrant go about it if it decided to ignore the climate?"

"They would go about it in a way that would point somewhere else entirely."

"Simply buy a revolution?"

Maclyn frowned. "Not so simple in the Arab country you're talking about," he said. "Dissenters in that country are either in jail or dead. Quadrant would have to import an army, or at least a company of highly skilled terrorists, along with arms and ammunition."

"So?"

"Just now that would not be easy to do," Maclyn said. "Getting men and arms out of this country is very difficult. Getting them into the Arab country is even more difficult. You couldn't fly them in to a guarded airport. You couldn't take them in by ship and disembark them on guarded decks. Maybe a year from now, when the climate may have changed, when the Arab government feels safer and more relaxed . . ." Maclyn sighed. "You know something, Jason? I could eat another lobster if I could afford it."

"Tell me how Quadrant can land an invading army and I'll buy you one," Dark said.

"If I agreed to such a deal I'd be cheating you," Maclyn said. "Because I don't know any way to do it."

At the very same time that Dark and Maclyn were lunching at Willard's Back Yard, two other men were lunching in a paneled office on the 43rd floor of a midtown office building. These two men were many times richer than Dark and Maclyn, but their luncheon consisted of two ham-on-rye sandwiches and two glasses of skimmed milk.

One of the men was a vice-president of Quadrant International. The other was the general manager of a firm called Worldwide Cargoes, Inc.

"I'm not very familiar with just how container cargoes work," Janway, the Quadrant man, said. As it happened he was thoroughly familiar with everything about Worldwide Cargoes, but he wanted Crimmins, their general manager, to put it into words for him. He was asking for what might have been called the 50-cent tour.

"We came into the business after Sea-Land had made a huge success of it," Crimmins said. "It's the most efficient way of trans-

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porting cargo from its point of origin to any place around the world."

He went on to explain. The cargo containers were large enough to fit onto a railroad flat car, or onto the chassis of a trailer truck. They were constructed to fit into the holds and onto the decks of specially built ships. The container, packed at the factory, was carried by rail or truck to a terminal that had dock facilities. The cargo, carefully prepared, could then travel by land or sea without fear of contamination or moisture.

"This is for dry cargo, of course," Crimmins said. "We have containers for bulk liquid that will hold five thousand gallons each. We have containers for automobiles that will carry five standard-sized cars. We have open-top containers that will allow cranes to load bulky machinery. We have insulated containers that will keep the contents at a fixed temperature to avoid spoilage. And we have ventilated containers that permit fresh air to circulate around the cargo and expel any inherent heat or gases."

"Very interesting," Janway said. "Let me tell you my problem. We want to ship several thousand young fruit trees to the Middle East. They don't need watering or tending, but fresh air is essential. These ventilated containers you mention sound as if they might do the trick."

"How many containers would you need?" Crimmins asked.

"I'd guess one dozen would do it. They'd be shipped from the middle west—Idaho, as a matter of fact. Eventual destination—well, I'll tell you that later."

"Simple," Crimmins said. "By truck from your orchards to the nearest railhead. By flat car to our terminal on the other side of the Hudson River in New Jersey. From there by ship direct to destination. I could show you on a map if you like."

"I can visualize it, Mr. Crimmins," Janway said. His smile had a secret quality to it. "These ventilated containers sound like just the ticket. Could I—could I have one of my orchard men take a look at one, just to be sure?"

"Of course."

The secret smile widened. "Then I think we have a deal for moving our fruit trees, Mr. Crimmins."

Sharon Evans was lying on the big couch in Jason Dark's book-lined living room. Propped up on her elbows, she was reading the evening paper. Across the room Dark worked at his desk. He had

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a stack of notes and some folders in front of him. From time to time he turned to look at Sharon. She seemed to be psychic, because each time he looked at her she turned away from her paper to smile at him.

Dark forced himself back to his notes and folders.

Sharon turned a page of her newspapers.

"Oh, brother!" she said. "Good old kindly Quadrant International."

Dark turned his head. The desk lamp glittered against his tinted glasses. "I have a feeling you didn't read that line with sufficient irony," he said.

"You can say that again! How do you like this—and I quote: 'Quadrant International, one of the world's giant corporations, is shipping five thousand fruit trees to the Middle East where engineers are already irrigating an acreage in the desert. Quadrant, which supports many business enterprises in the Middle East, is preparing this orchard and donating the trees as a gesture of good will toward its Arab friends.' " Sharon laughed. "Good will my foot! I'll bet the Arabs are donating twice the value of those trees to kindly old Quadrant—as a gesture of good will!"

"Is there any more?" Dark asked. "Where are the trees coming from?"

Sharon held a forefinger on the page to keep her place. "Would you believe Idaho? They're being sent on something called a container ship. Red, white, and black containers, each one the size of a truck—according to the picture here."

Dark reached for the folders on his desk and selected one. "Worldwide Cargoes," he said. "A subsidiary of Quadrant. They carry the product in huge containers by truck, by rail, by sea, to any place in the world." He looked up at Sharon, the folder still open in front of him. "You remember, I told you I asked Maclyn how Quadrant could land an invading army in a certain Arab country?"

"Jason! You're not suggesting—?"

"A man and a fruit tree would occupy just about the same amount of space, wouldn't you say?"

"But—"

"I thought we both agreed that Mr. Big wouldn't wait for the climate to grow milder. Do you still have that boy friend who works for the public school system, love?"

"Ex-boy friend," Sharon said.

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"Is he still with the school system?"

"Myron Kochak," Sharon said. "Yes, I think he's still where he was."

Dark leaned back in his chair, his eyes fixed on a top shelf of books. "Wouldn't it be marvelous if a group of children could be taken to Worldwide Cargoes' terminal on the New Jersey side? They've read about kindly old Quadrant sending five thousand fruit trees to help feed the starving Arabs in Worldwide's amazing freight containers. Good public relations for Worldwide, wouldn't you say, to let the school children get a glimpse of this wonderful new way of transporting freight? I'm sure Myron would take you along as a guest observer."

"And what would I observe?"

"Trees and armies—both have to breathe," Dark said. "There are acres and acres of these containers stacked at the terminal. It would be helpful to know exactly where the ventilated ones are located."

"How far do I go in persuading Myron to arrange this excursion?" Sharon asked, her eyes dancing.

"I hope no further than to bat your beautiful eyes at him, love."

"It would be inhuman to give him false hopes, Jason."

Dark's face had turned cold and hard. "It would be inhuman to let Mr. Big murder a thousand people in a foreign country for profit," he said.

Four days later 50 school children, plus teachers, plus Mr. Myron Kochak, plus his guest observer, Miss Sharon Evans, were taken on a tour of Worldwide Cargoes' New Jersey terminal. Four days was about right, Dark thought. Because there would be containers of fruit trees there, and they would have come from Idaho. And now the containers would be photographed, and much public-relations benefit would accrue to Quadrant International and Worldwide Cargoes.

Sure enough, on that very day there was a newspaper feature about the trees. The containers that contained them would be hoisted by cranes onto a container ship the following day.

The guide who took the children and the teachers and Mr. Kochak and Miss Evans around the terminal was very happy to show them the very containers in which the trees were packed. The guide commented on how generous it was of Quadrant International to help feed the poor of the Arab country, and how lucky

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they were to have Worldwide Cargoes to transport them safely.

Miss Evans, the special observer, was just a silly girl, the guide thought. She asked how the trees would survive a ten-day ocean voyage without air. She said she understood that plants had to breathe.

"These are ventilated containers, Miss Evans," the guide said. "If you'll look around the top of each container you'll see the ventilators."

On the way back to Manhattan on the ferry Mr. Kochak asked Sharon if she'd have dinner with him that night.

"I'm sorry, Myron, but I can't tonight."

"Tomorrow, then?"

"I'm sorry, Myron. But some time soon."

"I hope you mean it," Myron said.

"I do, Myron. You were an angel to arrange this fascinating trip."

On the way uptown in a taxi Sharon drew a rough map of Worldwide's terminal, marking clearly the location of the ventilated containers.

It was a dark night, with an overhang of clouds blotting out the moon and the stars. But it was brighter than the brightest day at Worldwide Cargoes' terminal on the Jersey side of the Hudson. Brilliant floodlights illuminated the many acres of ground and the hundreds of huge red, white, and black cargo containers lined up like carefully drilled squads and companies of troops.

Around the perimeter was a high wire fence bearing carefully spaced warnings to the general public that the fence was electrified. There were entrance gates north and south of the terminal where the huge containers could be brought in by rail or truck and parked according to a mathematical plan. On the east side was the river, with dock space for three ocean-going container ships, docked parallel to the pier. Great steel cranes reached up like fingers pointing to the sky. A large collection of jeeps was parked near the south end, ready to tow the containers into new positions when necessary, or to the dock itself.

At the north end there was one small entrance marked EMPLOYEES ONLY. For an employee to enter he must produce a punch card which a guard at the entrance would match against computerized information. Inside the electrified fence an army of gray uniformed guards wearing holstered guns and carrying rifles

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patrolled ceaselessly, around the border made by the fence, and in and out of the geometrically parked containers.

Worldwide Cargoes guaranteed absolute security for its customers' freight. Pilferage was impossible at this terminal. If proper precautions had been taken at the point of loading, Worldwide could make that guarantee stand up 100 percent. You might bribe a guard, but not an army of guards. None of the containers was loaded or even opened here at the terminal. They were simply hoisted onto the container ships and sent to the four corners of the globe.

Across from the employees' entrance at the north end of the terminal was a line of small buildings—a lunchroom, a newspaper and tobacco store, a clothing store where workmen could buy blue jeans, workshirts, gloves, and work shoes.

It was ten o'clock. Two or three employees were in the lunchroom taking a coffee break before their shift ended at midnight. One of them finished, paid for his coffee and cake, and walked out into the night. He was 50 yards from the employees' entrance, but the floodlights turned everything bright far beyond that distance.

"Give you a light?" a voice at the man's elbow asked.

The man turned to find himself confronted by a stranger, a short square man wearing tinted wire-rimmed glasses. The man was holding out a cigarette lighter.

"You nuts?" the workman asked. "Can't you see I ain't smoking, buster?"

The man with the tinted glasses snapped his lighter on, but there was no flame. Instead a pale vapor was directed straight into the face, the eyes, and the nose of the workman.

The workman staggered back, a cry of alarm choked off in his throat. He toppled over backward and lay still. The man with the tinted glasses took a quick look around, grabbed the workman by the heels, and pulled him into an alley between the lunchroom and the newspaper store. He went quickly through the unconscious man's pockets, found his wallet, and in it his employees' punch card.

From a previously planted cache the man with the tinted glasses retrieved a pair of coveralls, put them over his suit, pulled the unconscious man's work cap down over his forehead, and picked up a heavy leather bag with a shoulder strap. He hesitated, then produced a light blanket from the bag and covered the uncon-

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scious man with it. His smile was one-sided.

"Sweet dreams, chum," he said.

The man with the bag had no problem at the entrance gate. The guard there was watching a small portable television set. The New York Mets were locked in an extra-inning game with the St. Louis Cardinals. The punch card met with no objections from the computer.

A few yards inside the gate, however, there was trouble. An armed guard in a gray uniform brought the man with the bag to a halt.

"What you got in that bag, Jack?" the guard asked.

"Tools," the man with the tinted glasses said. "I'm supposed to check out on those ventilated containers that are carrying fruit trees to the Middle East in the morning. Those ventilators got to be in first-class working order or the Arabs won't be eating any apples or pears next spring."

"Open up," the guard said.

The man with the tinted glasses opened his bag. It contained tools—wrenches, pliers, hammers, drills, and a metal gun for shooting plastic wood into crevices or cracks that needed repair. The guard checked every item.

"Seems okay," he said.

The man with the tinted glasses smiled at him. "You expecting to find a bomb?" he asked.

"How the hell can you tell these days?" the guard said. "Especially when it's got to do with Ay-rabs. The ventilator containers are over in Row B, Section One."

"I was told," the man said. He moved casually toward Row B, Section One.

The containers Dark was looking for were stacked side by side, like giant freight cars. And, as on a freight car, at each end of each container was a little iron ladder that led up to the roof. Dark, his tool bag hanging by the strap over his shoulder, climbed up onto the roof of the first container. The ventilators were neatly spaced about a foot below the roof.

Dark opened his bag and took out the metal gun made for shooting plastic wood into crevices and cracks. He aimed it at the first ventilator.

"What the hell are you doing?" a voice called out.

Dark's muscles tightened. The guard who had checked him out was standing just below.

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"Just trying to blow out any dirt or anything else that might obstruct the flow of air," Dark said calmly.

"Oh—yeah," the guard said. He didn't know anything about ventilators. He would have known, however, that ventilators packed with plastic wood wouldn't permit any circulation of air at all.

Dark worked steadily, methodically, until it was almost midnight. He had succeeded in blocking all the ventilators on twelve containers. On his way out he joined the crowd of men going off that work shift. His guard acquaintance, standing near the gate, spotted him.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

"Everything is just dandy," Jason Dark said.

He followed the swirl of men toward the lunchroom, but at the last moment he slipped into the alley between it and the newspaper store. His earlier acquaintance slept peacefully under the blanket. Dark took off his coveralls and deposited his work cap beside the unconscious man. He pulled off the gloves he had been wearing and left them beside the cap.

From the far end of the alley came the sound of a low whistle. Dark smiled and headed that way. Waiting at the far end was a car. Sitting behind the wheel was Maclyn, the man from the State Department. Dark got in beside him.

"How did it go?" Maclyn asked.

"Fine."

"Jason, if this is some kind of pipedream—"

"Did I ever smoke you a pipedream, Mac?"

"The place is swarming with F.B.I. and C.I.A. men. If it turns out you've made a wrong guess I'm up the you-know-what."

Dark's smile was dreamy. "When it becomes known that Mr. Big and Quadrant International were planning to ship assassins and murder weapons to overthrow a foreign government, *they* should be in major trouble, shouldn't they, Mac?"

"Major, you bet—but it better be the way you say!"

They sat and waited. An hour. Two hours. Maclyn chain-smoked, fumed, fretted. Dark sat with his head resting against the back of the seat, his eyes closed, completely relaxed. There began to be light in the East, the gray light of early dawn.

"Damn it, Jason, you were wrong!" Maclyn said, between clenched teeth. "You sold me a cockeyed theory. So help me, I'll—"

Dark reached out and touched Maclyn's arm. "Listen!" he said.

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There was a rumbling sound, like someone pounding on metal, then like many people pounding on metal. Dark was reminded, absurdly, of a thunder sheet they had used backstage when he was involved in amateur theatricals in his youth.

"I think the fruit trees are yelling for air," Dark said. "Turn your army loose, Mac."

"My God!" Maclyn said.

"Men with a cause will die rather than reveal a plot," Dark said. "But paid mercenaries will always surrender when the danger is great—and talk."

In the next few hours the whole world would know, by way of radio, television, and satellite, that Quadrant International had planned a murderous coup. The Senate Committees, the United Nations, the governments of a dozen countries would be infuriated and would clamor for action. Mr. Big was in for it in a big way.

An hour later, in broad daylight, Dark made a phone call.

"It worked," he said. "It worked just fine."

"Oh, Jason, I'm so glad," Sharon said. "Where are you?"

"Downtown."

"Well, hurry home, love," Sharon said.

"Will do," he said, quietly jubilant.

They were one step closer to Mr. Big.

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THE TALE OF RAOUL

by DON KNOWLTON

They stood just outside the castle gates, looking down on the town. The castle, vast and forbidding, rose behind them, a jumble of towers, turrets, and slitted walls. The great pinnacle of rock on which it stood dominated the plain.

Mrs. Thompson sighed.

"I do wish we could sit down," she said. "They never seem to have—"

"Keep still! He's talking."

"And so," the tour guide was saying, "you have the rest of the afternoon free, to do as you please."

The voice droned on, and the party dissolved.

"I don't care," said Mrs. Thompson. "I'm sick of monuments and churches and sticky outdoor tables with flies."

"But, Edna! That's what you get on a conducted tour! *You* were the one who wanted—"

"Pardon, Madame, Monsieur. You are tired, no?"

It was the little man who had shown the party through the castle.

"So many stairs, such hard stones," he went on. "So it would be pleasant for a while to rest and contemplate? May I suggest—"

He pointed down toward the village.

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"You see where the others are going, toward the cathedral and the museum and the cafés? Ah, that is where you do *not* go. You follow them to the first corner and there, Monsieur and Madame, you turn left and walk toward the lake."

The man stepped close, as if imparting a secret.

"You will come soon to a bend in the road. There you will see, under a big oak tree, three benches; and from them the view is superb!"

"That's just what we want!" exclaimed Mrs. Thompson.

"I don't know," said her husband. "I could do with a drink—"

"Oh, Harry, come on!"

They turned left at the lime tree, and sure enough there stood an enormous oak, with branches soaring far overhead. Beneath the oak were three benches and on one bench sat a man wearing a blue beret and smoking a pipe—a man with a noble mustache.

As they drew nearer they saw under the big oak a small triangular plot enclosed by a low neatly trimmed hedge. Within the plot was what appeared to be a grave. It was a low mound of the right length, with a headstone.

The Thompsons stepped close to the hedge. On the headstone, which appeared quite ancient, was the single word: *Raoul.*

And then Mrs. Thompson gasped—and pointed.

"Beans!" she said.

Below the headstone the grave was planted with beans. Two neat rows. Yellow wax beans, just ripening. The beans were bordered by mignonette.

"Beans on a grave!" repeated Mrs. Thompson. The man on the bench took the pipe out of his mouth.

"You are wondering, no doubt, why beans instead of flowers?" he asked.

"You speak English!" Mrs. Thompson exclaimed.

The man with the blue beret nodded, and put back the pipe.

"Well, aren't you going to tell us about the beans?" Mrs. Thompson burst out.

"Very well—come sit down, on this bench opposite me, while I take you far back into the Middle Ages."

"Raoul, whose grave this is," began the man with the long mustache, "lived in the early part of the Twelfth Century.

"You may ask, why just Raoul, no surname. The answer is that Raoul was a serf. In those days, among the peasantry, there were

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no family names. A man was known only as his father's son—such as John, son of Peter. The name of Raoul's father has long since been lost to the memories of men. It may even be that his parentage was indeterminable. Immorality is not confined to the upper classes."

"My gracious!" said Mrs. Thompson, a little shocked.

"The lord of the castle at that time was Richard D'Espinay, a Count whose holdings embraced all the lands for miles around. He was a vile man, a brutal man, a cruel man; and he was hated with venom and with despair.

"In those days the domain of a Count was a little kingdom in itself. The nobles gave only partial and grudging allegiance to the King. Each noble had his retinue of men-at-arms; and the nobles fought each other and preyed on each other.

"Most of the countryside in those days was forest. There were no roads—merely muddy paths through the woods. Look back into time and you can see, coming around this very bend, men in mail, on horseback, followed by footmen, with perhaps a few captives lashed on palfreys, perhaps a few wounded carried in litters.

"Up they would go to the castle where they would feast and roister, and there would be wassail and rough singing. There would be a roaring fire of big logs, and a roast boar, and wine by the tankard.

"That would be *inside* the castle. But *outside* the castle—ah, outside the castle were the serfs—the slaves of the Count, the ones who did the work and tilled the soil, the ones who supported the Count and all his works.

"What was the house of a serf in those days? A miserable one-room log hut with a mud floor and pallets for beds. Chairs? Oh, no. Just rough stools. Dishes? They had none. In the crude table in the hut there were hollowed-out bowl-like depressions; the food was poured into those holes, then sopped up. They had pots to cook in—but fuel? They were allowed only the dead branches they could pick up on the floor of the forest.

"Food? Ah, they raised the food—but they were left just enough of what they raised to keep them alive. The fat steer, the prize pig, the plump rooster—oh, they went to the lord of the castle.

"Now, even under such circumstances man might find some satisfaction in living, perhaps—for the sky would still be blue, the flowers would bloom in the spring, the birds would sing, and there would always be love. But there could be no joy in the lands of

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Count D'Espinay. For he was a monster, that Count—a sadist, a gleeful torturer, a man who delighted in the suffering of others.

"The Count's men had long knotted whips with which they scourged the serfs. Men were beaten, men were hacked open, men were killed, for the sheer fun of it.

"And the women? Ha! Can you understand, Madame, that a mother rejoiced if her young daughter had smallpox, because the Count would not take the pitted ones?"

"But that's unbelievable!" broke in Mrs. Thompson. "Weren't there any laws—"

"That *was* the law of those days, Madame. A Count was the master of the persons of his serfs and could do with them whatever he wished. For example: the law said that if, when a Count returned from a ride, his feet were cold, he could warm them by slitting the belly of a serf and sticking them inside!

"Now, Monsieur and Madame, you have in your minds a sketch of the world into which our Raoul was born.

"He was, as I said, a serf. He was big, he was tough, he was strong. But he was also simple. He took the world as he found it, the Count's world, and he even got some pleasure out of it.

"For Raoul was a gardener at heart, and his passion was beans. He was so expert at growing beans that they let him grow nothing else. What mattered it to him if the Count's men came and took and took and took? It was the planting, the tending, that he loved. Give him soup and cabbage and black bread, just enough to keep him alive, and a good plot of ground to plant the beans, and he was content.

"Now, it so befell that one bright morning, down the path, on horseback, came two of the Count's men, riding fast; and they rode down an old man who had not been able to get out of the way quickly enough. This caused one of the horses to stumble and throw its rider. Whereupon the other horsemen drew rein and dismounted; and as the old man, trampled and bleeding, tried to crawl away, they set upon him with whips.

"This Raoul could not endure. He rushed out of his bean patch, braved the whips, picked up the old man, and carried him to his hut; where the old man died. Whereupon Raoul was, as they said in the weird justice of those days, arrested, tried, and convicted of resisting the authority of the Count, and sentenced to life imprisonment in the castle.

"Now, there was more in this than at first glance meets the eye.

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"There was hard work to be done, and the prisoners would do it. There were walls to be built, stairways and turrets to be repaired, the moat to be cleaned out, wood to be carried, armor to be polished, new paving to be done in the courtyard. So that was where Raoul found himself.

"Now, as I said, Raoul was simple. He did not question the Count's right to put him where he was. Doing hard work was no hardship; he liked to use his great muscles.

"But Raoul was homesick for beans!

"It was not liberty he craved. It was the feel of the seed beans, the texture of the soil at planting time, the sight of the sprouting beans poking their leaves through the loam, the push of the new growth, the delicate, half-concealed blossoms; and then the beans themselves, tiny twig-like things miraculously lengthening, almost overnight, into tender luscious beauties.

"And his heart would ache. If only, once more, before he died, he could grow a bean!

"That was what, day after day, went through his mind, as he sat in that cell of his, that they showed you when you went through the castle—"

"Raoul's cell?" broke in Mrs. Thompson. "Why, the guide didn't say anything to us about it. We didn't see—"

"*Diable!* Madame, do you mean to tell me that you were not shown the famous cell that was occupied by Raoul? The one that the sunlight penetrates? Didn't you see the dungeons?"

"Yes, but we didn't—"

"Ah, these guides, this modern commercialism, this insufferable laziness! Take the tourists through fast and tell them as little as possible! It is disgusting. You should have been shown Raoul's famous cell. Because upon it hangs this whole story, this headstone, this grave.

"For, you see, the particular cell in which they had put Raoul had one feature different from any other cell in the castle. True, it was barred, it was nothing but an empty cubicle of stone—but by a peculiar accident of construction the sun, when there was sunshine, shone into the cell through the window bars for three hours in the afternoon! It was the only cell into which the sun came at all; and if it were not for the sun there would be no story for me to tell.

"One evening, as the prisoners were being returned to their cells after the day's labor, Raoul saw at his feet a bean. Swiftly he

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bent, picked it up, and tucked it into his cheek.

"Alone in his cell, at twilight time, he examined it. A bean! His very own kind of bean! Dropped by accident in the courtyard.

"Raoul fondled it, sang little songs to it; he recaptured, by the sight of it, fresh spring days when the wind blew warm and the soil smelled sweet. He must keep it, he must hide it—but where? Near the roof of his cell, on one wall, there was a little stone projection, a tiny ledge. That would do.

"So it was that as Raoul sweated over his work during the day, he thought only of returning at evening to his lone bean.

"Then he would dream dreams. And out of those dreams came a tremendous conceit. If only he could get that bean to grow!

"What would it take? A pot of some kind, sun, earth, and water.

"Sun he had, in his cell, the only cell in the whole castle into which the sunlight fell! Three hours of sunlight on afternoons when it was not cloudy! This seemed to him a good omen.

"Water? Yes, he could spare some, from his daily jug that was given him in his cell.

"A pot? Where could he put it? On the window sill, of course, where it would get the sun. The barred window was deeply recessed. The turnkey was a lazy lout; he seldom came into the cell, he just shoved the food under the door. A potted bean plant pushed up against the bars, on the sill, in the corner not visible from the corridor, might not be noticed for some time.

"But how to get a pot? Well, he was given porridge in an earthen pot. One night when, after the evening meal, the turnkey came to take the tray away, Raoul kept the pot—and the turnkey did not notice! Again, a good omen.

"Now all that he needed was earth. Ah, but that was a problem!

"Could he not, you may ask, scrape off the mud from his shoes? Oh, no, it was not so simple. For he wore wooden shoes, and a wooden shoe can be a weapon, and so, before they entered their cells after the day's work, the prisoners were made to take off their shoes and leave them outside, in the corridor.

"So one night Raoul prayed. He knelt on that cold stone floor and he said, 'Oh, God, dear God, give me but a little dirt, a bit of soil. Just that, oh, God. That is all I ask.'

"And next morning came the answer. It came as Raoul stepped out into the sunlight with the rest of the serfs. He happened to be looking at his hands—he stopped still and said to himself, 'There is earth under my fingernails!'

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"Under his *fingernails*!" exclaimed Mrs. Thompson.

"Yes, Madame. You with your little hands, so soft and manicured—never would you think of such a thing. But when a big man, a man with large hands, works in stone and earth, there is under each nail, when the day is done, a little black crescent. Monsieur, were you never surprised, sometimes, at how much dirt could be under your nails?"

"When I was a boy on the farm," Thompson began—

"Exactly! You realize, Madame, that for each day the sum total was—how shall I say it?—an infinitesimal fraction, a—wait, you have a word for it—a smidgen.

"Raoul hid up his sleeve, one day, a tiny sliver—and with this, each night, he scraped the dirt from under his nails and added to his hoard.

"Fancy him there, in the almost-dark of the evening! The turnkey will probably not come back that night, but he might. So, listening for any warning footfalls, Raoul works away with his little sliver—and into the pot drop a few pitiful grains of dirt. And Raoul smiles. Precious dirt that someday may grow a bean!

"Now—will you believe me, Madame and Monsieur, when I tell you that this went on for *seven long years*?

"Can you conceive of it? The hope? The patience? The fortitude?

"Autumn blew its way into winter, winter thawed into spring, spring bloomed into summer, and the year waned again into autumn. Round and round the sun rolled the earth, seven times around—and still, a big man with a simple mind scraped from his nails, each night, one more mite of earth. Oh, it is tragical to think of it.

"But at long last the pot was full. Now for the planting of the bean!

"Raoul waited until the end of May, when the sun would be strong. Then one night he took out the pot, thrust the bean into the earth, watered it from his jug, and set it in the hidden corner of the window sill.

"What a milling there was in his breast during the next few days! Would it sprout? Each morning before he left the cell to work with the other prisoners, he would look long at the surface of the earth in the pot. Was there a slight swelling, as if something below were pushing up? All day long he thought of nothing else.

"And so, one morning, he awoke with the singing of a lark, out

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in the free outside, ringing in his ears. He sprang up, he leaped to the pot—and there, in the center, was a tiny mound of earth. The bean had sprouted!

"By the time he returned to his cell that night, the first green was showing; and the next morning there it stood, a seedling bean, with its twin leaves, each one-half of the bean itself, borne aloft as on a tiny single stilt. And Raoul got down on his knees and gave thanks to a generous God.

"Day by day Raoul watched it grow. It reached up and out, toward the afternoon sunlight. Its seed leaves broadened; and then, between them, there appeared the beginnings of the mature leaves.

"He felt a sort of rapture. There was a bean growing—his own!

"Alas, poor Raoul! There is no justice in the web that is woven by the fates. How could Raoul know that his days were numbered—all because of the King of France?"

"The King of France!" said Mrs. Thompson. "Why, what—"

"I must tell you the political situation, Madame. You see, the King of France was trying to weld this country into a nation. Some sided with him, some opposed him—and against the latter it was necessary to use force. The King was therefore raising troops. The Count D'Espinay's quota was twenty.

"Now the Count, although he pretended to support the King, was secretly plotting against him. The Count wanted no higher authority that might interfere with his rule of terror and abuse. He had no intention of sending the King good men and true. But it would not, at the moment, be wise to refuse; men, of some sort, he must furnish.

"Aha, he thought, I have it. I shall look over my prisoners; among them I should be able to find twenty who are still strong enough to march from here to Paris. They can go and fight and be killed—it will be good riddance.

"So it befell that one morning, when Raoul was looking at his precious bean plant, there came to his cell not just the turnkey to let him out to go to his day's work—along with the turnkey came the Count D'Espinay himself. And instead of opening the door for Raoul to come out, the turnkey and the Count stepped inside his cell.

" 'Come over to the window, where I can get a good look at you,' said the Count. And Raoul, half paralyzed with fear and wonder, did so.

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" 'He looks husky enough,' the Count said to the turnkey. And then the Count's eye lit on the bean plant, in its pot on the window sill.

" 'What is this?' asked the Count, turning to the turnkey. But the turnkey, who had never set eyes on the pot before, was speechless.

" 'You know I allow no foolishness!' thundered the Count; and the turnkey quivered. 'Now,' went on the Count, turning to Raoul, 'what is this?'.

" 'A bean plant,' said Raoul, twisting and untwisting his great hands.

"The Count stared at Raoul, at the turnkey, at the pot—and broke out into peals of laughter.

" 'By all that's holy,' he said, 'if this isn't the strangest thing I've ever seen—'

"And as he said it, the Count turned toward the pot, reached out, and with his fingers snapped the bean plant in two.

"Like a flash Raoul was upon him. In an instant, before the turnkey could do more than stare, Raoul had snapped the back of the Count as the Count had snapped the stem of the bean. The Count lay broken on the floor, as the bean plant lay broken in the pot."

"You mean he *killed* him?" asked Mrs. Thompson, her eyes wide.

"With his bare hands, and instantly, Madame. *Pouf*—and the Count was no more.

"Now, there was the turnkey, with his pike, and you would have thought he would have run Raoul through on the spot. But the turnkey was not only lazy, he was a coward. He leaped outside into the corridor and locked the cell door. Then he ran up into the castle with the terrible news.

"Oh, there was shouting and running and some yelled orders that nobody obeyed, and all was confusion. The word spread like a forest fire—the Count is dead! Raoul has killed the Count! Out of the castle it sped, out to the fields, out to the huts. Men with bowed backs stood straight and raised their faces to the sky and the sun; for now there was at least hope. Women knelt and thanked a merciful God.

"Of course Raoul was to be hanged. It would be a public hanging, staged in front of the castle, for all of the serfs to see. And after the hanging the body would be left dangling on the rope, to

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swing in the wind, until the crows were through with it.

"On the day that Raoul was hanged, with the serfs standing ominously silent, looking up from below, fighting broke out in the castle. The Count D'Espinay had no sons. Who would inherit? There was a half brother; there was also a nephew. Both lived far away. When the news reached them, they would come with all haste to the castle. It would be force, not legality, that would decide the issue. And presto, there was miniature civil war.

"That is why, that night, there were no watchers on the walls. Within the castle there was uproar. But before the gates, where the gallows stood, there gathered, in the dark of the early hours, ten silent and determined serfs. They climbed the gallows, cut the rope, and carried Raoul's body away. They buried it here, where it now lies. This oak was then at the edge of the great forest. They put up no marker, they covered the spot with brush—so no one at the castle would know where Raoul lay. But *they* knew. All the serfs knew.

"Now for the sequel. News of the impending contest between the Count's half brother and the Count's nephew reached the King of France, with word that blood had already been shed. That gave him an excellent excuse. He marched in at the head of a column of warriors who had proved themselves in battle, and he took over the lands of the Count D'Espinay for himself. Then he gave them to Sir Guillaume Courteney, to whom he was indebted for a great service.

"Sir Guillaume was a good man, a humane man. He asked loyalty of his serfs—but there was kindness in the land now instead of cruelty. There was even the feeling that the serfs were people, like the ones in the castle. For Sir Guillaume was a staunch adherent of the King, and the King was trying to make France into a country. To do this the King knew he needed the support of the people, *all* the people. So there was a relaxing of the old feudal laws, an abandonment of medieval barbarism, and the start of civilized living.

"Out of that emerged, centuries later, the concept of the Rights of Man, and that concept, Monsieur and Madame, gave rise to your American Revolution!

"Now, to the simple people who lived here, *who* began all that? Raoul! Raoul, who grew a bean in prison—Raoul, who killed the wicked Count!

"When the serfs knew they need no longer be afraid, they put a

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narker on Raoul's grave. And every summer, on his grave, they ɔlanted beans. And that, my friends, has been done from genera-ion to generation for some eight hundred years! Truly a touching tory, is it not?"

"It is beautiful," sighed Mrs. Thompson.

"Of course it is a burden, in a way, because somebody has to do he planting and the tending. But when I think that I am merely ontinuing a noble tradition—"

"Oh—do *you* do it, yourself?"

"Yes, Madame. You see, that is my house, over there across the ɔath, and through the centuries it has been the custom that he who lives in that house cares for the grave. After all, it involves ıot too much time."

"But it *is* work," said Mrs. Thompson. "It is wonderful of you to lo it. Do you think—would it be all right—if we made a little con-ɪribution?"

"Madame! I assure you that it is completely unnecessary! But of ourse, if you insist—"

As the Thompsons passed out of sight, there emerged, from a *ɔension* on that corner, an elderly gentleman with a cane, whose eatures and bearing spelled "British Army, Retired."

He walked slowly toward the little park with the grave and the ɡiant oak. As he drew near he nodded familiarly to the figure with the long mustache and the blue beret, who still sat, smoking ıis pipe, on one of the benches.

"Good afternoon, Emile," said the military man.

"Beautiful day, Major," returned Emile.

The Major sat down and lit an Indian cheroot.

"How did you do today, Emile?" asked the Major.

Emile shrugged. "Not bad. Nothing this morning—but this af-ernoon, five dollars American."

Another silence. The Major stared dreamily.

"Tell me something, Emile," he said. "Is there *any* truth in that tory you tell?"

Emile sat up straight. "But of course not!"

"Then there never was any such person as the Count D'Es-ɪinay?"

"Certainly there was never any such person!"

"And that prison cell, the only one in the castle that the sun-ight reached—"

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"There is no such cell."

"You mean, then, that the whole tale, beans and all, is made up out of whole cloth?"

Emile laughed. "They make fun of French idioms," he said, "but look at the English ones! Made up out of whole cloth! It was made up, yes—but what has cloth to do with it? Why not out of hal cloth? Or out of whole cabbages?"

"But you did—"

"Yes, I concocted it. I devised it, I originated it. There is not a word of actual fact in it. It is a fantasy, a fabric of the imagination, fiction pure and simple. There is an English idiom again!"

"I've been meaning to ask you," said the Major, "how you learned to speak English so well."

"Ah," exclaimed Emile, "but that is the crux of the whole matter! I see now I must tell you all. When I was a boy the shadow of war hung over France. There is no hope here, no future, said my father. Go to America. So at the university I set myself to master the English language.

"Then came the war, out of which I miraculously emerged whole and sound, and then the occupation. All that my father had prophesied seemed fulfilled. So, as soon as I could, I went to the United States.

"Oh, I did many things in the States! But one thing about the States I learned above all else. In the United States people work. They work hard.

"Now that, Major, did not appeal to me. I am allergic to effort. And so, when my father died and left me this little place, I came home."

Emile gestured toward the trim house across the path.

"It is small," he said, "but it is beautiful. The orchard, the vineyard, the garden, the lake—what more could one ask? And besides, there was, back here, a girl waiting to marry me.

"There was, of course, the problem of a little cash. So I got a job as a guide, up at the castle. But I was still not happy. It was the castle stairs! Upstairs, downstairs, on those hard, hard stones, the same stairs, day in and day out—*diable!* So I began to think.

"I thought about Monsieur Clery with his curio shop next to the cathedral who sells authentic medieval relics that were manufactured in Paris last month. I thought about Monsieur Cardigan who for one hundred francs will show you a room in which Napoleon slept, in a house that was not built until fifty years after

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Napoleon died. And I thought about the Americans, the ones I knew in the States and the tourists who visited the castle. Is the rest not self-evident?"

"Then," said the Major, "there was no grave—"

"I created it. I got a weathered piece of stone, and chiseled *Raoul* on it, in letters that would look worn with age. I put in the hedge, I planted the grave with beans, the mignonette border. And I sat on my bench and let the tourists come to me. Pierre, who guides now in the castle, picks out the likely ones and sends them down. I give him a commission—ten percent."

"What I can't understand," said the Major, "is how in the world you ever came to think of it in the first place. Beans and fingernails! Especially the fingernail part."

"It was my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Yes. It was she who gave me the idea. One fine May afternoon I finished guiding up at the castle and I rushed back down to my garden to put in a row of beans before supper. By that time my wife had supper waiting. I gave my hands just a hurried rinse and sat down at the table.

"My wife took one look at me and she said, 'Emile, you go back and scrub your hands! There's enough dirt under your nails to start a garden!' "

"Q"

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

TOP PRIZE: Movies have their Oscars, television has its Emmys and the theater its Tonys. But to mystery writers, the big prize is the Edgar Allan Poe Award of the Mystery Writers of America, better known as the Edgar—a ceramic bust portraying the father of the detective story. It's a little after the fact, but in case you missed the news in the spring, here are the major winners for the best works produced in the genre in 1975: Novel—Brian Garfield (author of *Death Wish*) for *Hopscotch* (M. Evans). First Novel—Rex Burns for *The Alvarez Journal* (Harper & Row). Short Story—Jesse Hill Ford for "The Jail" (*Playboy,* March 1975). Juvenile Mystery—Robert C. O'Brien for *Z for Zachariah* (Atheneum), awarded posthumously. Screenplay—Lorenzo Semple, Jr. and David Rayfiel for *Three Days of the Condor* (Paramount). TV Special—William Baxt for *The Legend of Lizzie Borden* (ABC). Teleplay in a series—Joe Gores for "No Immunity for Murder" on CBS's *Kojak.* A special Edgar was awarded to Jorge Luis Borges and the Grand Master Award for a lifetime of achievement in the mystery, went to Graham Greene.

SURPRISE: Agatha Christie has been gone for some months now, but her books have not ceased to appear. Last year, in plenty of time for the Christmas season, there was *Curtain,* the final Hercule Poirot novel. It proceeded to spend several months as the country's number one seller. Now, her American publisher for more than half a century is preparing to release *Sleeping Murder* (Dodd, Mead, $7.95), the last adventure in the busy life of Miss Jane Marple. If it's not a blockbuster, it will be the ultimate surprise ending.

REPRISE: Victor Canning's *The Rainbird Pattern* (Award Books, $1.50) has just been reissued to coincide with the release of the new Alfred Hitchcock film, *Family Plot,* on which it is based. *Crime on Her Mind,* a collection of stories featuring female detectives, has a paperback edition

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published by Pantheon ($3.95). The comprehensive chronological survey by Michele B. Slung is more than worth the price. On a similar theme is a work edited by Dr. Arthur Liebman called *Ms. Mysteries* (Pocket Books, $1.95). Astonishingly, neither volume has a story about Miss Marple—the most famous sleuth of her sex.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Few readers need be reminded that, in the golden age of comic-book heroics, it was crime which was the motivating force spurring the cloaked crusaders to don their costumes. In *Secret Origins of the Super DC Heroes* (Harmony Books), the informative text by Dennis O'Neil and some rare reproductions chronicle again how Captain Marvel is gifted with ancient magic "to battle the forces of evil;" how callous racketeers looting an American Indian museum convert its curator into the Green Arrow; and especially how Batman is born (the killing of his parents by gangsters inspires Bruce Wayne to vengeance dressed as a creature of nocturnal dread)—all molded in part by Maxwell Grant's Shadow, artist Bob Kane, and the late Bill Finger, a writer whose contribution to melodrama has yet to be fully appreciated.

Ron Goulart's admirable *The Adventurous Decade* (Arlington House) tells how the newspaper comic strips of the 1930s were rich with police heroes such as Red Barry and Radio Patrol with its then innovative radio squad cars. Sadly, few survive, and in today's syndication market red-blooded adventure continuities pale beside the more popular "funny" strips. Happily, one of the best, Alfred Andriola's detective Kerry Drake, still thrives, second only to Dick Tracy in daily and Sunday use. Early in his career Andriola did the Charlie Chan strip, honing much closer to the Biggers' original than to the movies, then took over cop Dan Dunn for a while, "closing his case book in the final panel" in 1943 to start a creation of his own—young but silver-haired assistant D.A. Kerry, drawn with cinematic realism and beset by such colorful villains as the memorable suture-scarred Stitches. Now Kerry is a lieutenant of detectives, married to a policeman's widow, and settled into a stable family life (indeed, becoming the father of quadruplets). In a comics page alas increasingly surrendering to the comic, Kerry Drake is worth seeking out.

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INTERVIEW: EDWARD D. HOCH

The most prolific writer of mystery short stories today, Edward D. Hoch has created many popular series characters. Perhaps the best known is Nick Velvet, the thief of worthless treasures, but other enduring characters include Rand, Captain Leopold, Dr. Sam Hawthorne and Simon Ark, the strange figure who claims to be 2,000 years old.

EQMM: What influenced you to become a mystery writer?

HOCH: I suppose it was an interest in reading mysteries in my youth. I remember the first adult book I ever read—at the age of nine—was *The Chinese Orange Mystery* by Ellery Queen. It was among the first group of paperbacks published, and I recall going down to the corner drugstore and seeing them all lined up, with their laminated covers. I debated for some time between James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* and an Agatha Christie title (it may have been *The Body in the Library),* and finally settled on Ellery Queen because I had heard the Ellery Queen radio program which was so popular in those days. I bought *The Chinese Orange Mystery* and was completely fascinated by it, sought out all the other Ellery Queen novels I could find in paperback, as Pocket Books published them over the next few years, and from there went on to read other things. I read Sherlock Holmes at about that time too.

EQMM: And this helped you become a mystery writer?

HOCH: Yes. I'd always wanted to be a writer. When I was a young child, I used to draw cartoon strips and have masked villains running around—they were terrible, just stick figures, because I wasn't much of an artist, but I'd try to draw in cloaks and masks to identify the villains so that I could have a final unmasking to surprise the reader. Of course, I was the only reader—no one else saw those strips.

EQMM: That may explain your genesis as a writer, but how can you account for your prolific output? You've had more than 400 short stories published.

HOCH: I guess ideas just come easily to me. That's why I've always been more attracted to the short story form than the novel. I am more interested in the basic plotting than in the development of various sub-plots. And I think the basic plot, or gimmick—the type of twist you have in detective stories—is the thing I can do best, which explains why so many of my stories tend to be formal detective stories rather than the crime-suspense tales that so many writers are switching to today.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Your mentor, now fully recovered from a long and tedious illness, once more mounts the familiar rostrum to preach. *Plus ça change, plus ça c'est la même chose.* Let's hope this rejuvenated mentor won't bore you.

Should I try to assess books published during my absence, or ignore the hiatus and carry on?

Well, that problem has been solved by compromise. Among items dutifully read during convalescence, two were of such outstanding merit that they could not be ignored. Therefore we shall begin with those two. Both are fair-play detective novels spiced with thrill, though one depicts high-pressure modern London and the other carries us back to nineteenth-century British India at the peak of Victorian power. In conclusion, bringing us up to date, the second pair under review will be the two best novels landing on this desk in recent weeks.

Candles for the Dead by Harry Carmichael (Saturday Review Press, $6.95) offers another intriguing problem to the amateur detective team of Insurance Investigator John Piper and cigarette-cadging Quinn, ingenious-minded crime reporter whose first name we never hear.

David Breame, flying home to London after business in Stockholm, brings with him an elaborate cake which, he explains to the customs, he has been persuaded by a sensuous Swedish blonde to carry as a birthday present for the blonde's seven-year-old child, now in England with the child's father.

When the cake proves to have certain suspicious contents, when neither alleged child nor alleged father can be found, inexplicable violence explodes at once. David Breame's wife won't forgive his night of love with the Swedish blonde. After Breame has been tortured by two thugs for something they don't find, his innocent business partner is brutally slain in the flat Breame has shared with that unrelenting wife.

Crime Reporter Quinn takes up the trail as more murder erupts. He and Piper sift the clues, arriving at the same solution as Scotland Yard. Together they nail the principal villain of a murder-for-profit scheme far more subtle and complex than it appears. Here's sophisticated *diablerie,* highly recommended.

Rich in Victorian detail, Francis Selwyn's *Sergeant Verity and the Imperial Diamond* (Stein and Day, $7.95) glorifies Detective Sergeant William Clarence Verity, plainclothes detail, from the orig-

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inal Scotland Yard at Whitehall Place.

Sent to India on police duty during the savage Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, stout and pink-faced Verity swelters in formal frock coat as he attacks a mystery apparently impossible of solution. The *Kaiser-i-Hind,* a huge diamond symbolizing rule, vanishes as though by magic at the very moment it is handed over to Britain.

What Verity may lack in formal education he more than provides in native intelligence. His explanation of the vanished diamond (and who stole it) is as ingenious as it is well conceived and fair. His saga is entwined with that of Judith Perry, an English beauty who has been captured by Nana Sahib, evil genius of the mutiny.

Enfin, let the reader beware! Our tale has not ended even when Judith and Verity are homeward bound. There's one last surprise, which might well have shocked Her Majesty's government if close-mouthed Sergeant Verity had ever decided to speak.

In *Gently with the Painters* by Alan Hunter (Macmillan, $6.95) we follow Superintendent George Gently, C.I.D., through this tricky maze of murder in an English cathedral city.

Attractive young Shirley Johnson, artist-wife of a former R.A.F. hero, has been found stabbed to death behind dustbins at City Hall. Amid many would-be painters, only one of them professional but most of them eccentric, Gently stumbles through conflicting clues until the right lead sparks a disclosure few but the connoisseur will anticipate. First-rate.

If all selections this month are British, that's how the ball bounces. And there's some fast, expert bouncing throughout Dick Francis's new racing epic, *High Stakes* (Harper & Row, $7.95).

Steven Scott, whose talent for inventing profitable toys earns him the wealth to buy a sound stable of horses, has been cheated of more than thirty thousand pounds by his false friend and trainer, Jody Leeds. Aided by real friend Charlie Canterfield and Alexandra Ward, the American girl, Scott contrives to settle the hash of his enemy at the climax of this really brilliant run.

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"Q"

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

SWAG, by Elmore Leonard. Delacorte Press, $7.95.

Publishers Weekly, January 26: "A streetwise, electrifying novel built on desperate characters and the psychology of crime.... It's not easy to empathize with such criminals, but the murderous, well-timed, suspenseful finale will strangely win these losers some friends."

New York Times Book Review, April 4: "Will have the critics mentioning Chandler and Higgins—it's that good.... A tough, well-written book....At the end there is an ingenious, wry twist. The writing is tough and realistic. The approach does owe something to George V. Higgins, but Leonard is nobody's follower, and he has a style of his own....*Swag* is one of the best of the year."

GIANTS OF MYSTERY, edited by Ellery Queen. The Dial Press, $8.95.

This diversified book is the 31st in the series of semi-annual anthologies of stories first published in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.* It contains 3 short novels and 11 short stories by such giants in the genre as Rex Stout (about Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin), John D. MacDonald, Ed McBain (about the 87th Precinct), Robert L. Fish, Isaac Asimov (about the Black Widowers), Berkely Mather, Holly Roth, E. X. Ferrars, and Ellery Queen (about Ellery Queen). Whether the reader's preference is for detection or suspense, the police procedural or the psychological study, this collection is certain to satisfy all tastes.

DEATH IN GENTLE GROVE, by Francis Allan. Mason/Charter, $7.95.

Tuesday, Roy Turner, the town banker, died mysteriously from a shotgun wound. Friday, Amanda Bacon tried a door to the shut-up rooms she no longer lived in and her fingers came away sticky. Saturday, Doc Bynum had a desperate visitor. For Gentle Grove, a Texas Bible-belt town, these are the beginnings of a terror-filled weekend. Tension builds until the reader can only guess at the outcome and dread the fact that his answer may be correct.

Lorimar Productions have announced that they will make a $6-million movie of Francis Allan's *Death in Gentle Grove.*

THE BIRTHDAY GIFT, by Ursula Curtiss. Dodd, Mead, $5.95.

A birthday gift was to involve Lydia Peele in some things she would just as soon not have known about. When she offered to deliver the valuable Colonial mirror to a friend's relative in a quaint Connecticut town, she never imagined that such a simple task might draw her and Desmond Moran, her journalist friend, into a sinister drama, one in which she would face grave danger.

Here is another intriguing story by the author of many widely praised novels of suspense, including *Letter of Intent* and *Don't Open the Door.*

"Entertaining suspense."—*Booklist.*

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TITLE NO.	AUTHOR	TITLE	PUBLISHER	RETAIL PRICE	DISCOUNTED PRICE
52169	Allan, Francis	DEATH IN GENTLE GROVE	Mason/Charter	$7.95	$6.35
74144	Burns, Rex	THE ALVAREZ JOURNAL	Harper & Row	6.95	5.50
77775	Carmichael, Harry	CANDLES FOR THE DEAD	Saturday Review Press	6.95	5.50
75841	Christie, Agatha	CURTAIN	Dodd, Mead	7.95	6.35
78063	Curtiss, Ursula	THE BIRTHDAY GIFT	Dodd, Mead	5.95	4.75
52642	ed. by Ellery Queen	GIANTS OF MYSTERY	Dial Press	8.95	6.95
77881	Francis, Dick	HIGH STAKES	Harper & Row	7.95	6.35
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52863	Hunter, Alan	GENTLY WITH THE PAINTERS	Macmillan	6.95	5.50
75036	Leonard, Elmore	SWAG	Delacorte	7.95	6.35
79855	O'Brien, Robert C.	Z FOR ZACHARIAH	Atheneum	6.95	5.50
54217	Selwyn, Francis	SERGEANT VERITY AND THE IMPERIAL DIAMOND	Stein & Day	7.95	6.35
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a *NEW* Scott Jordan story by
HAROLD Q. MASUR

The first time Albert Osborn needed Scott Jordan's services it was strictly in Jordan's capacity as a lawyer. The second time was different. Osborn needed more than legal work—he needed Scott Jordan's detective ability. And it was the kind of case that needed a tough-minded, no-nonsense legal beagle . . .

MURDER NEVER SOLVES ANYTHING

by HAROLD Q. MASUR

Albert Osborn was an ambitious young man, volatile, brash, self-confident. But all these characteristics quickly dissolved under the pressure of calamitous events. I found him sitting disconsolately in his cell at the 19th Precinct, subdued and chastened.

"Thank God," he said fervently, clasping his hands in supplication. "Thank God you're here, Mr. Jordan."

"I heard the news, Albert. Did you kill her?"

He swallowed and shook his head.

I had first met Albert two years ago when he'd bought a junior partnership in a Wall Street brokerage firm, using money borrowed from a doting aunt, Mrs. Agnes Mahler, a fluttery, powder-haired lady, the childless widow of a wealthy scrap-metal dealer. Albert had retained me to handle the legal details. And until this morning, apparently, he'd had no further need for a lawyer.

Now Aunt Agnes was dead. Someone had banged an ancient Grecian urn against the base of her skull. And within 24 hours New York's finest had put the arm on Albert Osborn, the victim's only living relative and sole legatee under her last will and testament.

"How come they nominated you, Albert?" I asked.

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"We had a terrible fight, Aunt Agnes and I," he said miserably. "One of her neighbors heard us and told the police."

"A fight about what?"

"I needed some money and Aunt Agnes lent it to me, but her check bounced."

"How much money?"

"Eighty thousand dollars."

I lifted an eyebrow. "I thought that all the partners in your firm, Zachary and Company, were making a bundle. What happened?"

He sighed. "Do you know about the two-thousand percent rule?"

"Vaguely. Refresh my recollection."

"Brokers operate on borrowed money, mostly lent by banks. The Stock Exchange prohibits us from raising more than twenty times our net capital. Zachary and Company exceeded the limit."

"Using what as collateral?"

"Unregistered stock."

"That's against the law, Albert."

"I know. I know. And when the bank caught on, they called in the loan immediately and notified the Exchange. The Board of Governors gave us an ultimatum: raise enough cash within a week to take us out of violation or suffer a suspension. So Mr. Zachary laid an assessment on every partner for his proportionate share. My contribution was the smallest, eighty thousand dollars. I was strapped, Mr. Jordan. Like everyone else I'd taken a bath when the market got clobbered."

"So you appealed to Aunt Agnes."

"I had no choice. If I couldn't raise the money, I'd lose my interest in the firm."

"And your aunt agreed?"

"Willingly. She'd just returned from a long Caribbean cruise and was in a good mood. She drew a check to my order. I deposited it and gave one of my own to Mr. Zachary."

"They bounced?"

"Like rubber balls. Both marked INSUFFICIENT FUNDS. Here." He took Mrs. Mahler's check from his pocket and proffered it. "Mr. Zachary," he continued, "was very chilly. He gave me forty-eight hours to make good or clear out my desk." Albert's chin went out of control. "My future, everything, all down the drain."

"Take it easy;" I said. "What happened next?"

"I was wild. I went storming over to my aunt's apartment. I

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ranted and berated her and called her all sorts of names. I have a terrible temper, Mr. Jordan. I'm not proud of myself."

"Did she offer an explanation?"

"She kept shaking her head. She said the bank must have made a mistake. But banks don't make mistakes like that, Mr. Jordan." He blinked at me. "I admit I made a lot of noise—but I didn't kill her."

"Did she have any enemies?"

"I don't think so."

"Close friends?"

"The lady next door. Mrs. Stewart—Claire Stewart. They visit back and forth all the time. It was Mrs. Stewart who told the cops about our fight. Listen, this is an awful place. Can't you get me out of here on bail?"

"Not likely, if you're indicted for homicide. But I'll see what I can do."

He sat, deflated and forlorn, watching dismally as the turnkey let me out. Over at Homicide the cops were disgorging information with all the prodigality of a slot machine. So I appealed to Detective Lieutenant John Nola and got little more than consideration.

"Counselor," he told me, "this time you've got a loser. The accused needed money. He was slated to inherit the victim's estate. He was angry at her and he threatened her. There was no sign of a forced entry. Nothing missing. His fingerprints were on the murder weapon. All of which gives us that unholy trinity—means, motive, and opportunity. The Grand Jury will vote a true bill and we're going to process your client into the slammer for life plus forty. You'll never prove him innocent."

"I don't have to, Lieutenant. That's a legal presumption in his favor. You fellows have to prove him guilty."

He simply smiled and shifted one of those thin Schimmelpenninck cigars to the other side of his mouth. I walked out, flagged a cab, and drove to the site of the crime—an old dowager of a building on Park Avenue operated now by an economy-minded landlord. Self-service elevator and no doorman. Claire Stewart's apartment was listed on the directory. I identified myself and she buzzed me in.

I had been expecting one of the victim's contemporaries, someone's ancestor, shrunken, wrinkled, arthritic. Instead I was greeted by a tall abundant redhead in her early forties, vital and

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vivid, totally feminine, and given to bravura flourishes. I sat in her sumptuous living room and listened.

"I really don't know whether Albert killed his aunt or not," she said. "I merely told the police what I heard. This building is one of the old ones, you know, solid, with very thick walls, and we don't usually hear our neighbors. But oh, my, Albert was in a state. Turned up to several hundred decibels. And the language! I haven't heard words like that since I divorced my first husband."

"For example?"

"I will not repeat such obscenities."

"If it goes to trial the prosecutor may insist."

"In open court? Why, that's disgusting!"

"Did Albert threaten his aunt?"

"Not in so many words. He told her she was a deceitful, stingy old woman who had outlived her usefulness. I just hope he remembers those words when he's in a wheel chair in some nursing home. Did you know they found his fingerprints on the murder weapon? A Sixteenth Century urn that Agnes' dear departed husband had smuggled out of one of those Greek islands. It was Mr. Mahler's most prized possession and after he was cremated Agnes kept his ashes in it. Isn't that touching? And then because it was used in such a terrible way all the ashes spilled out and were trampled into the carpet by the police. I think that's sacrilegious. Agnes simply venerated those ashes."

"Would Mrs. Mahler open the door for anyone who rang?"

"Are you kidding? This city is a jungle. People are being mugged and killed all over the place. Agnes was super-cautious. She would never have admitted a stranger. But she would certainly have opened the door for Albert, especially if she thought he had returned to apologize."

"Did you speak to her after he left?"

"She came here straightaway and confided in me. She was terribly upset. She simply could not understand why the bank had refused to honor the check. And she used my phone to call the bank and tell them they had made a very costly error and that she was going to hold the bank responsible. She said she would be down there first thing in the morning for a full explanation. But of course she never did go. Poor dear."

"Who found the body?"

"A cleaning lady who came every morning. When nobody answered her ring she called the super and he used his passkey."

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"I take it he notified the police, Mrs. Stewart."

"Yes. And please, don't be so formal. Call me Claire. Your first name is Scott, isn't it? Do you like duck?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Duck is my favorite dish. I prepare it even better than Maxim's in Paris. I'd like to invite you to dinner some evening this week."

"I'll have to check my appointment book and call you back."

"My number is unlisted." She scribbled it on a card and came over and tucked it into my breast pocket, smiling warmly. "Murray Hill 4-0040. Call soon."

I promised and departed hastily.

Agnes Mahler's bank was the Gotham Trust. I knew it well. The Madison Avenue branch has a most impressive facade. I headed for the desk of Mr. Harry Wharton, third vice-president, a neat compact man with a salesman's smile and a tax collector's eyes. The smile faded as I explained the situation.

"Mrs. Mahler," he said, "was a valued depositor of this institution. A little vague and confused at times, but otherwise no problem. She traveled frequently and had a custodial account. We held her securities, clipped her coupons, collected her dividends, and I advised her on investments and made quarterly reports. Her death shocked us. Of course we stopped all activity in her account until the estate goes through probate. You say one of her checks bounced? Impossible. She was a wealthy woman. Let me check it with Martin Schorr, our assistant cashier."

He dialed three digits on the intercom. "Schorr? Front and center. On the double. And bring the file on Mrs. Agnes Mahler."

A moment later Schorr came trotting through the door, a slight clerical specimen with thick glasses. He was clutching a bulky folder.

"Just tell me," Wharton demanded curtly, "why we refused to honor a check on Mrs. Mahler's account?"

"Insufficient funds, sir."

"Nonsense! Mrs. Mahler keeps much more than eighty thousand dollars in her savings account. We automatically transfer funds to cover her checks."

"There have been heavy withdrawals over the past few weeks."

"By whom?" I asked.

"The depositor, sir." Schorr opened the folder and showed me a bunch of withdrawal slips.

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I examined them. But I knew that Agnes Mahler had been out of the country during that time. She could not possibly have conducted these transactions. I had the check she'd given Albert in my pocket. I took it out and compared its signature with those on the withdrawal slips. They were not even remotely similar.

"Someone goofed," I told Wharton. "The signatures on these withdrawal slips are forgeries."

"What? What are you talking about?"

I showed him. He riffled the file for Agnes Mahler's original signature card, then visibly relaxed. "You're mistaken, Counselor. Here is the card Mrs. Mahler signed when she opened the account. The handwriting is identical with the withdrawal slips."

"Then the card is also a forgery, Harry. I have the check Mrs. Mahler gave Albert Osborn. It was written in his presence, so the signature has to be genuine. Observe the capital 'M' in Mahler. A simple letter. Now look at the fancy loops and flourishes on the card and on the withdrawal slips. No similarity at all."

Wharton frowned. "Perhaps Osborn is lying. Perhaps he wrote the check himself."

"Then he would have done a much better imitation. He would have made at least a minimal attempt to copy her signature. But we have other ways to learn which signature is genuine. We can compare it with the handwriting on her will, which was attested by two witnesses. Easier still, go back four or five months and compare it with earlier withdrawal slips."

He nodded and rummaged in the file. His face turned grim. He had to clear his throat twice, then he made a gesture of total resignation. "I'm afraid you're right, Counselor. The handwriting *is* different. Somebody must have pulled the original signature card and substituted a forged one."

"Clever," I said. "Any withdrawals under the new signature would check with your records and be honored. Had to be one of your own people, Harry, fleecing the account. Probably with an outside confederate, a woman who pretended to be Mrs. Mahler. Better tag your employer before he guts the whole damn bank."

Wharton made a face. "Counselor, almost every employee in this institution has access to the signature files. Tellers and cashiers are constantly comparing money instruments against those cards."

"I take it you're insured."

"Of course we're insured. But with every fraud and embezzle-

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ment our premiums soar." He turned to the assistant cashier. "We'll need a complete audit of Mrs. Mahler's account, from the ground up. Start it rolling at once." After Schorr had left, he appealed to me. "Where do we start? We bond all our people. We check their backgrounds. And still this sort of thing goes on. How can you keep people from stealing?"

"Easy," I said. "Triple all employees' salaries and remove the temptation or the need."

That suggestion did not sit well. He gave me an aggrieved look. "Do me a favor, Jordan. Take your ideas and—"

"Don't say it, Harry. Bankers are supposed to be dignified. You know you'll have to replace all that money in Mrs. Mahler's account. It may ultimately belong to my client."

"Only if you prove him innocent."

He was right. The law is clear. A legatee cannot profit by his own misdeeds. He may not accelerate his bequest by liquidating the testatrix.

But the picture was no longer entirely bleak. Back at my office I thought about it. I knew now that someone else may have had a motive to silence Mrs. Mahler. And I needed to know more about that someone else. The only source of information I could think of was Claire Stewart. I am not especially fond of duck, either roasted, stewed, or fricasseed. But a lawyer often makes sacrifices for the sake of his client. So I reached into my breast pocket for the card bearing her telephone number.

I stared at it, my eyes wide, my pulse quickening—stared at the "M" in Murray Hill with its fancy loops and flourishes. Calligraphy identical with the "M" in Mahler on the substituted signature card in the bank's file. Identical with the handwriting on the recent withdrawal slips.

I did not phone her. Instead I rang Macbeth—Fitz Macbeth, that is—the private eye who practically has a monopoly on investigative work for lawyers. He has a large staff and a number of free-lance operatives on call, all ex-cops who had opted for early retirement.

He listened to me and said, "You want around-the-clock surveillance of Mrs. Claire Stewart. Starting when?"

"This minute."

"For how long?"

"Until further notice."

"And your description is adequate?"

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"The lady is *sui generis*. Nobody around quite like her."

"It's going to cost, Counselor."

"Fitz, have I ever skunked you on a bill?"

He laughed and broke the connection.

I finished the afternoon working on other matters, then took some papers home with me. I ate a solitary TV dinner and was correcting syntax on a pending appeal when the call came—from one of Macbeth's men reporting that Claire Stewart had left her apartment at 9:42 P.M. to rendezvous with a man at a nearby cocktail lounge. Was I interested? I was. He gave me the address and I hurried out and flagged a cab.

I recognized the operative loafing against a light pole. "Still in there," he told me.

I headed for the bar, chin tucked in, hat pulled down. I ordered a Tuborg and encompassed the room through a wall-length mirror. I saw them in a booth, leaning toward each other, speaking intently. They seemed to be arguing. Martin Schorr looked nervous and Claire Stewart was grim. She had her bravura flourishes under control, trying not to attract attention.

This was neither the time nor the place for a confrontation. I ducked out quickly, face averted. "Okay," I told the operative. "Stick with her until the next shift arrives. Can Fitz reach you if necessary?"

He showed me a small box. "Fitz gives me a beep, I call him back from the nearest booth."

Several times in the past both the D.A. and the police have accused me of withholding evidence material to the solution of a felony. The felony here was top drawer. Homicide. So I decided to play this one according to the book. I found Lieutenant Nola at home, watching a televised ballet on NET, one of those thin Dutch cigars smoking itself between his teeth.

He shut off the set and listened while I dumped it in his lap—the bank swindle, the cast involved, the whole works. I said, "You spoke to Mrs. Stewart. You had a chance to size her up."

He rolled his eyes.

"Exactly," I agreed. "And a man like Schorr, a wallflower type, unprepossessing, deprived, he'd be an easy mark for Mrs. Stewart with all those obvious charms. She'd have no difficulty enlisting his cooperation. What I think happened, one of them panicked when Agnes Mahler blew the whistle and phoned the bank. They took advantage of the fight between Albert and his aunt to divert

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suspicion to Albert. Mrs. Stewart volunteered that information pretty quick."

He studied the card with her telephone number. "You're certain this handwriting matches those forged signatures?"

"Without question."

"No shenanigans, Counselor?"

"My hand on the Bible, Lieutenant."

"You're saying that Schorr supplied a blank signature card and she filled it out and he substituted it for the original?"

"Yes."

"And where would the Stewart woman get blank checks or a passbook for withdrawals?"

"She and the victim were always visiting back and forth. She could easily have lifted them while Mrs. Mahler was in the kitchen or the bathroom."

"Wouldn't Mrs. Mahler have noticed their absence?"

"Ordinarily, yes. But Mrs. Stewart probably waited until just before Agnes took off on a long cruise."

He pursed his lips. "Damned careless of the Stewart dame to let you have a copy of her handwriting."

"I never said she had a full deck, Lieutenant. She was probably trying to cultivate me, hoping to wheedle information or exert influence if I got too close."

Nola stood up. "Schorr sounds like the weak partner in this conspiracy. Let's sweat him first. If he cracks we should have no trouble with the lady." He pointed to a telephone book. "Check the man's address."

He managed to commandeer a prowl car. It took us to a five-story walkup on Second Avenue. I anticipated little trouble with Martin Schorr. He possessed neither the Byzantine shrewdness nor the toughness of his accomplice. We found his door partly open—in that neighborhood a fearless act, or a careless one, or perhaps he was expecting someone.

But Schorr didn't even know his door was open. A bullet hole in the left temple had stopped him from worrying about such matters. Or anything else.

Nola bent and touched the corpse. "Still warm," he said harshly. "Dammit, we couldn't have missed the perpetrator by more than minutes." He used the dead man's phone and called it in, then looked at me. "Off the top of my head. The obvious conclusion. A dead accomplice cannot share the loot or implicate his

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partner. I think we should brace the lady while her adrenalin is still pumping."

"Let me make a call first," I said. "It may save us time." I got through to Macbeth. "Fitz, contact your man and get me a quick rundown on Mrs. Stewart's activities during the past hour. Ring me at this number. It's urgent."

Nola's technical support, with sirens, and Macbeth's response arrived simultaneously. I picked up the handset. Fitz said, "Here it is, Counselor. The lady and her escort left the cocktail lounge about fifteen minutes after you did. They separated immediately. She walked home and he flagged a cab in the opposite direction. She hasn't left her apartment since."

"No other exit?"

"Only the service door, in clear view."

I relayed the information to Nola. "It shoots down your theory, Lieutenant. Schorr was still alive when she left him."

"Then the lady will keep for a while. Where can I get some background on Schorr?" Nola asked.

"From Mr. Harry Wharton, Schorr's boss at the Gotham Trust."

On our way Nola made only one comment, directed at his driver. "Shut off that damn siren."

Wharton's apartment was far more impressive than Schorr's. He was, after all, in a higher bracket. I introduced Nola and gave Wharton the news about his cashier.

He gaped at us, incredulous. "Schorr an embezzler? Dead? I can't believe it."

"Did the man have any relatives?" Nola asked.

"I don't think so." Wharton shook his head. "Do you know the name of his accomplice?"

"Yes."

"Did she kill him?"

"We have evidence to the contrary."

"How did you manage to identify her?"

"The accomplice blundered and disclosed her identity to Jordan."

"Is the accomplice in custody?"

"Not yet," I interjected. "We had a theory, Harry, and then Schorr's death put a different face on it. We had to scrub our inference that it was Schorr who devised the swindle and set it up. I don't think he had anything at all to do with it. May I use your phone?"

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I did not wait for permission. I dialed the Murray Hill number and when I had her voice on the line I said in a tense mimicking whisper, "Claire? Harry. No time to explain. Clear out. Fast."

Sudden alarm strained her voice. "What is it, Harry? What happened?"

I hung up.

The color had run out of Wharton's face. It was now stiff with restraint, tissue-gray, his eyes fixed on mine. I said, "That's all the confirmation I need, Harry. It struck me less than a minute ago. You wanted to know if we had identified Schorr's accomplice and then you asked if *she* had killed him. We never told you it was a woman."

He swallowed hugely. "My God, Jordan, that was a natural assumption. It was a woman who withdrew the money."

"Yes. But your calling the accomplice 'she' and 'her' opened my eyes. Then I suddenly remembered your response at the bank—as if you knew nothing about Agnes Mahler's call after her check bounced. Not likely, Harry. Who would she ask for? *Only you,* Harry. You handled her account. You gave her advice. You visited her apartment to discuss investments. And that's where you met Claire Stewart. She's hard to resist. She made a play for you and you tumbled. She's a lady with expensive tastes and the liaison must have required a lot of money. Whose idea was it to plunder the Mahler account? Yours or hers?"

He made a desperate reach for words. "You're mistaken, Jordan, terribly mistaken!"

"I don't think so, Harry. Mrs. Mahler threatened to blow the whistle. It would start an investigation that could sink you. You needed time to cover yourself. And the old lady was expendable. So you paid her a visit. She would certainly open the door for her banker. You saw the urn and you used it. But murder never solves anything, Harry. It only creates new problems. And one of those problems was Martin Schorr.

"He was nosing around. He probably knew you had something going with Claire Stewart—she may have picked you up at the bank several times. I think he knew her name because she too was a depositor at the bank. She must have opened an account as an excuse to see you during the day.

"As soon as Schorr checked her signature he was in the picture. It gave him what he needed, a chance to cut himself in for a piece of the action. And he figured the lady would be easier to handle.

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A very risky undertaking, after what happened to Mrs. Mahler. So of course Schorr had to be eliminated, and quick. So you moved immediately, right after Claire phoned and told you what he wanted."

Wharton appealed to the lieutenant. "Not true. Not a word of it." But his voice lacked conviction.

I said coldly, "You shot him, Harry. Did you get rid of the gun? A professional would have dropped it off the Staten Island ferry or one of the bridges. But you're not a professional. So it's probably hidden right here in this apartment. The lieutenant's men know how to search and when they find it, your goose is cooked. They'll collar Mrs. Stewart and she'll sing her lungs out, pinning it on you, trying to clear her skirts."

Nola got to the phone and snapped out an All Points Bulletin on the lady. It sent Harry Wharton into a tailspin of despair. He sank into a chair and lowered his face into his hands.

"All right, Lieutenant," I said. "This one is all yours. Now do me a favor, please. Call the D.A. and start the ball rolling so I can spring my client. I have to earn my fee."

"You've already earned it. But how can Osborn afford your usual whopping fee if he's broke?"

"You forget," I said. "Albert is still Mrs. Mahler's sole legatee. There's a sizeable estate involved, especially after the bank replaces all that embezzled loot."

Nola grinned. "Well, Counselor, he owes you more than a fee. If you ask me, he owes you his skin."

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a *NEW* short story by
RUTH RENDELL

Ruth Rendell's short stories are sensitive and subtle, and they have a substance that is not always "visible" on the printed page. We might call them "iceberg stories"—the significant mass is not exposed to view. Except—her stories are warm as flesh and blood. And to mix metaphors, and give you something else to "see," we might call this newest story by Ruth Rendell one that will take you "down the garden path"...

A DROP TOO MUCH

by RUTH RENDELL

You won't believe this, but last Monday I tried to kill my wife. Yes, my wife, Hedda. And what a loss that would have been to English letters! Am I sure I want to tell you about it? Well, you're not likely to tell her, are you? You don't know her. Besides, she wouldn't believe you. She thinks I'm the self-appointed president of her fan club.

The fact is, I'm heartily glad the attempt failed. I don't think I've got the stamina to stand up to a murder inquiry. I'd get flurried and confess the whole thing. (Yes, thanks, I will have another drink. My back's killing me—I think I've slipped a disk.)

Hedda and I have been married for fifteen years, and I can't complain she hasn't kept me in the lap of luxury. Of course I've paid my own price for that. To a sensitive man like myself it is a little humiliating to be known as "Hedda Hardy's husband." And I don't really care for her books. It's one thing for a man to write stuff about soldiers of fortune and revolutions in South American republics and jet-set baccarat games and seductions on millionaires' yachts, but you expect something a little more—well, delicate and sensitive from a woman. Awareness, you know, the psychological approach. I've often thought of what Jane Austen said about the way she wrote, on a little piece of ivory six inches

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wide. With Hedda it's more a matter of bashing away at a great rock face with a chisel.

Still, she's made a fortune out of it. And I will say for her, she's generous. Not a settlement or a trust fund though, more's the pity. And the property's all in her name. There's our place in Kensington—Hedda bought that just before house prices went sky-high—and the cottage in Minorca, and now we've got this farmhouse in Sussex. You didn't know about that? Well, that's crucial to the whole thing. That's where I made my abortive murder attempt.

Hedda decided to buy it about six months ago. Funnily enough, it was the same week she hired Lindsay as her secretary. Of course she's had secretaries before, must have had half a dozen, and they've all worshipped the ground she trod on. To put it fancifully, they helped fill my cup of humiliation. (And while on the subject of cups, old man, you may refill my glass. Thank you.)

I'll tell you what I mean. They were all bitten by this Women's Lib bug, so you can imagine they were falling about with glee to find a couple like us. And though I manage to be rather vague about my financial position with most of our friends, you can't keep things like that dark from the girl who types the letters to your accountant, can you? The fact is, Hedda's annual income tax alone amounts to—let me see—yes, almost six times my whole annual income.

Those secretaries were mistresses of the snide comment. What did you say? All right, I don't mind admitting it; a couple of them were my mistresses too. I had to prove myself a man in some respects, didn't I? But Lindsay—Lindsay's different. For one thing, she'd actually heard of *me*.

When Hedda introduced us, Lindsay didn't come out with that It-must-be-wonderful-to-be-married-to-such-a-famous-writer bit. She said, "You write that super column for *Lady of Leisure,* don't you? I always read it. I'm crazy about gardening."

My heart warmed to her at once, old man. And when Hedda had finished making poor sweet Lindsay type about twenty replies to her awful fan letters, we went out into the garden together. She's really very knowledgeable. Imagine, she was living with her parents in some ghastly suburban hole and doing their whole garden single-handed. Mind you, though, it's living in the suburbs that's kept her so sweet and unspoiled.

Not that it was just that—I mean the gardening bit—that

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started our rapport. Lindsay is just about the most beautiful girl I ever saw. I adore those tall delicate blondes who look as if a puff of wind would blow them away. Hedda, of course, is handsome after a fashion. I daresay anyone would get a battered look churning out stuff about rapes and massacres year after year between breakfast and lunch.

The long and the short of it is that by the end of one week I was head over heels in love with Lindsay. And she feels the same about me. What did you say? You should be so lucky? I reckon I deserved every bit of luck I could get in those ruddy weeks while Hedda was buying the farmhouse.

Honestly, Hedda treats me the way some men treat their wives. Pours out all her troubles, and if I don't grovel at her feet telling her how wonderful she is, she says I don't know what it is to have responsibilities and that, anyway, I can't be expected to understand business. And all this because the house agent didn't phone her at the precise time he'd promised to and the seller got a bit uptight about the price. I don't blame him, the way Hedda drives a hard bargain.

(Another Scotch? Oh, well, if you twist my arm.) Hedda got possession of the place in March and she had an army of decorators in, and this firm to do the carpets and that one to do the furnishings. Needless to say, I wasn't consulted except about the furniture for what she calls my "den." Really, she ought to remember it isn't lap dogs who live in dens.

It's an extraordinary thing how mean rich people can be. And quixotic. The thousands she spent on that wallpaper and those Wilton rugs, but when it came to the garden she decided I could see to all that on my own, if you please. Hedda really has no idea. Just because I happen to know the difference between a calceolaria and a cotoneaster and am able—expertly, if for once I may blow my own trumpet—to instruct stockbrokers' wives in rose pruning, she thinks I enjoy nothing better than digging up half an acre of more or less solid chalk. However, when I said I'd need to hire a cultivator and get the Lord-knows-how-much top soil and turfs, she was quite amenable—*for her*—and said she'd pay.

"I don't suppose it'll come to more than a hundred or so, will it?" she said. "With the stock market the way it is, I don't want to sell any more shares." Just as if she was some poor little housewife having to draw it out of Post Office savings. And I knew for

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a fact—Lindsay had told me—she was getting £50,000 for her latest film rights.

She'd had the old stables at the end of the garden converted into a double garage. You can't park on the road itself—there's too much through traffic; but there's a drive that leads down to the garage between the garden and a field. Not another house for miles, by the way. But the garden was a real wilderness and at that time you had to plow through brambles and giant weeds to get from the garage to the house. Taking care, I may add, not to fall down the well on the way. Oh, yes, there's a well. Or there was.

"I suppose that'll have to be filled in," I said.

"Naturally," said Hedda. "Or are you under the impression I'm the sort of lady who'd want to drop a coin down it and make a wish?"

I was going to retort that she'd never dropped a coin in her life without knowing she'd get a damn sight more than a wish for it, but she'd just bought me a new car so I held my tongue.

I decided the best thing would be to fill the well up with hardcore, concrete the top, and make a gravel path over it from the garage entrance to the back kitchen door. It wasn't going to be a complicated job—just arduous—as the brickwork around the well lay about two inches below the level of the rest of the garden. The well itself was very deep, about forty feet, as I knew from measuring with a plumb line.

However, I postponed filling in the well for the time being. Hedda had gone off to the States on a lecture tour, leaving mountains of work for poor little Lindsay—a typescript to prepare about a million words long, and the Lord knows how many dreary letters to write to publishers and literary agents and all those people for whom the world is expected to stop when Hedda Hardy is out of the country.

Still, since Hedda had now established her base in Sussex and had all her paraphernalia there, Lindsay was down there too and we had quite a little honeymoon. I can't begin to tell you what a marvel that girl is. What a wife she'll make!—for some other lucky guy. I can only say that my wish was her command. And I didn't even have to express my wish. A hint or even a glance was enough, and there was the drink I'd just begun to get wistful about, or a lovely hot bath running or a delicious snack on a tray placed right there in my lap.

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It made a change for me, old man, the society of a really womanly old-fashioned woman. D'you know, one afternoon while I happened to be taking a little nap, she went all the way into Kingmarkham—that's our neighboring town—to collect my car that had been serviced. I didn't have to ask, just said something about being a bit weary. And when I woke up, there was my car tucked away in the garage, and Lindsay in a ravishing new dress tiptoeing about getting our tea so as not to disturb me.

But I mustn't get sidetracked like this. Inevitably we began to talk of the future. Women, I've noticed, always do. A man is content to take the goods the gods provide and hope the consequences won't be too difficult. It's really quite off-putting the way women, when one has been to bed with them once or twice, always say, "What are we going to do about it?"

Mind you, in Lindsay's case I felt differently. There's no doubt, marriage or not, she's the girl for me. I'm not used to a sweet naiveté in the female sex—I thought it had died with the suffrage—and to hear the assumptions Lindsay made about my rights and my earning power et cetera really did something for my ego. To hear her talk—until I set her right—you'd have thought I was the breadwinner and Hedda the minion. Well, you know what I mean. Unfortunate way of putting it.

We were bedding out plants one afternoon when Lindsay started discussing divorce.

"You'd divide your property, wouldn't you?" she said. "I mean, split it down the middle. Or if you didn't think that quite fair to her, she could keep this place and that sweet cottage in wherever-it-is, and we could have the Kensington house."

"Fair to her?" I said. "My dear girl, I adore you, but you don't know you're born, do you? All these hereditaments or whatever the lawyers call them are *hers*. Hers, lovey, in *her* name."

"Oh, I know that, darling," she said. By the way, she really has the most gorgeous speaking voice. I can't wait for you to meet her. "I know that. But when you read about divorce cases in the papers, the parties always have to divide the property. The judge makes a—a what's-it."

"An order," I said. "But in those cases the money was earned by the husband. Haven't you ever heard of the Married Women's Property Act?"

"Sort of," she said. "What is it?"

"I'll tell you what it means," I said. "It means that what's mine

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is hers and what's hers is her own. Or, to enlarge, if she fails to pay her income tax *I'm* liable, but if I fail to pay mine the government can't get a bean out of *her*. And don't make me laugh, sweetheart," I said, warming to my theme, "but any idea you may have about a division of property—well, that's a farce. There's nothing in English law to make her maintain me. If we got divorced I'd be left with the clothes on my back and the pittance I get from *Lady of Leisure*."

"Then what are we going to do about it?" she said.

What a question! But, to do her justice, she didn't make any silly suggestions as to our living together in a furnished room. And she was even sweeter to me than before.

Of course she loves me, so she doesn't feel it a hardship to run around laying out my clean clothes and emptying my ashtrays and fetching the car round to the front door for me when it's raining. But I know she thought I'd have a shot at Hedda, ask her to let me go and make a settlement on me. I could picture Hedda's face! Having a deeply rooted idea that she's the most dynamic and sexy thing since Helen of Troy, my wife has never suspected any of my philanderings and she hasn't an inkling of what's in the wind between me and Lindsay.

The funny thing is, I had an idea that if I did tell her she'd just roar with laughter and then say something cutting about church mice and beggars who can't be choosers. Hedda's got a very nasty tongue. It's been sharpened up by writing all that snappy dialogue, I suppose.

Anyway, when Hedda got back she wasn't interested in me or Lindsay or all those petunias and antirrhinums we'd planted. The first thing she wanted to know was why I hadn't filled in the well.

"All in good time," I said. "It's a matter of priorities. The well can get filled in anytime, but the only month to plant annuals is May."

"I want the well filled in now," said my wife. "I'm sick of looking at that disgusting heap of hardcore out there. If I'd wanted to look at rocks I'd have bought a house in the Alps."

What I'd said about priorities wasn't strictly true. (Thanks, I will have that topped up, if you don't mind.) I didn't want to fill in the well because I'd already started wondering if there was any possible way I could push Hedda down it. It had become a murder weapon, and to fill it up with hardcore now would be like dropping one's only gun into the Thames off Westminster Bridge.

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Hedda hadn't made a will, but so what? As her widower, I'd get the lot. All through those hot weeks of summer while I stalled about the well, I kept thinking of Lindsay in a bikini on Hedda's private beach in Minorca—only it would be my private beach—Lindsay entertaining guests in the drawing room in Kensington, Lindsay looking sweet among the herbaceous borders at the farm, *my* farm. And never a harsh word from her or a snide remark. I'd never again be made to feel that somehow I'd got an invisible apron on. Or be expected to—well, accede to distasteful demands when I had a headache or was feeling tired.

But how do you push an able-bodied woman of thirty-eight, five feet ten, a hundred and fifty-two pounds, down a well? Hedda's an inch taller than I am and very strong. Bound to be, I suppose, with all the T-bone steaks she eats. Besides, she never goes into the garden except to walk across it from the garage to the back kitchen door when she's put her Lincoln Continental away. I thought vaguely of getting her drunk and walking her out there in the dark. But Hedda doesn't drink much and she can hold her liquor like a man.

So the upshot of all this thinking was—nothing. And at the beginning of this month Lindsay went off for her three-weeks' holiday to her sister in Brighton. I'd no hope to give her. Not that she had a suspicion of what was going on in my mind. I wouldn't have involved a sweet little innocent like her in what was, frankly, a sordid business.

As we kissed goodbye, she said, "Now, remember, darling, you're to be extra specially loving to Hedda and get her to settle a lump sum on you. Then afterwards, when it's all signed, sealed, and settled, you can ask for a divorce."

I couldn't help smiling, though I felt nearer to tears. When you come across ingenuousness like that, it revives your faith in human nature. And when you come to think of it, old man, what an angel! There she was, prepared to endure agonies of jealousy thinking of me making love to Hedda, and all for my sake. I felt pretty low after she'd gone, stuck at the farm with Hedda moaning about not knowing how to get through all her work without a secretary.

However, a couple of days at bashing away on the typewriter with two fingers decided her. She couldn't get a temporary typist down in Sussex, so she'd go back to Kensington and get a girl from the nearest agency. I wasn't allowed to go with her.

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She stuck her head out of the Lincoln's window as she was going off up the drive and pointed to the heap of hardcore.

"Faith doesn't move mountains," she yelled. "The age of miracles is past. So let's see some damned action!"

Charming. I went into the house and got myself a stiff drink. (Thanks, I don't mind if I do.) It was fair enough being alone at the farm, though painful in a way after having been alone there with Lindsay. A couple of postcards came from Lindsay—addressed to us both for safety's sake—and then, by a bit of luck, she phoned. Of course, I told her I was going to be alone for the next three weeks, and after that she phoned every night.

Remember how marvelous the weather was last week and the week before? Not too hot, but ideal for a spot of heavy engineering in the open air. I was just resigning myself to the fact that I couldn't put off filling in the well a day longer when I got this brilliant idea.

Oddly enough, it was television that inspired me. Hedda doesn't care for watching television, though we've got two big color sets which she says, if you please, she bought for my benefit. I hardly think it becomes her to turn up her nose at the medium, considering what a packet she's made out of getting serials on it.

Be that as it may, I don't much enjoy watching it with her supercilious eye on me, but I'm not averse to a little discriminating viewing while she's away. It must have been the Friday night I saw this old Hollywood film about some sort of romantic goings-on in the jungle. Dorothy Lamour, I think it was, and Johnny Weissmuller—it was that old. But the point was, there was a bit of wild animal trapping in it, and the way the intrepid hunter caught this puma thing was by digging a trough right on the path the hapless beast frequented and covering it up rather cunningly with branches and leaves.

It struck me all of a heap, I don't mind telling you. The occasion called for opening a bottle of Hedda's Southern Comfort. In the morning, a wee bit the worse for wear, I spied out the land. First of all I needed a good big sheet of horticultural polythene, but we'd already got plenty of that for the cloches in which I was going to have a stab at growing melons. Next the turfs. I drove over to Kingsmarkham and ordered turfs and the best quality gravel. The lot was delivered on Monday.

By that time I'd got all the surrounding ground leveled and raked over, smooth as a beach after the tide's gone out. The worst

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part was getting rid of the hardcore. Hedda was damned right about faith not moving mountains. It took me days. I had to pick up every chunk by hand, load it onto my wheelbarrow, and cart it about a hundred yards to the only place where it could be reasonably well concealed, in a sort of ditch between the greenhouse and the boundary wall. Must have been Thursday afternoon before I got it done to my satisfaction. I remember reading somewhere that the human hand is a precision instrument that some people use as a bludgeon. I wish I could use my hands as bludgeons. By the time I was done, they looked as if they'd been through mincing machines.

I waited till nightfall—not that it mattered, as there wasn't an observer for miles, apart from a few owls and so on—and then I spread the polythene over the mouth of the well, weighting it down not too firmly at the edges with battens. The lot was then covered with a thin layer of earth so that all you could see was smoothly raked soil, bounded by the house terrace, the really lovely borders of annuals that Lindsay and I had planted, and the garage at the far end.

I was pretty thankful I'd got those turfs and that gravel well in advance, I can tell you, because the next day when I went to start my new car, I couldn't get a squeak out of it. Moxon's, who service it for me, had to come over from Kingsmarkham and pick it up. Some vital part had conked out, I don't know what—I leave all that mechanical stuff to Hedda. But the thing was, I was stranded without a car which rather interfered with my little plan to surprise Lindsay by popping down to Brighton for her last week.

She, of course, was dreadfully disappointed that she wasn't going to get her surprise. "Why don't I come back and join you, darling?" she said when she phoned that Saturday night.

And get wind of what was going on down the garden path?

"I'd much rather be with you by the sea," I said. "No, I'll give Moxon's a ring Monday morning. If the car's ready I'll just have to stagger into Kingsmarkham on the eleven-fifteen bus and collect it. It's only an hour's run to Brighton. I could be with you by lunchtime."

"Heaven," said Lindsay, and so it would have been if Hedda hadn't sprung a little surprise of her own on me. Luckily—with my heavenly week ahead in view—I'd laid all those turfs and made a neat gravel path from the garage to the back kitchen door when, on Sunday night, Hedda phoned. She'd got all her work

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done, thanks to the efficiency of the temporary girl, and she was coming down in the morning for a well-earned rest. By twelve noon she'd be with me.

But I didn't feel dispirited and there didn't seem any point in phoning Lindsay. After all, we were soon going to be together forever and ever. Before I went to bed I made a final survey of the garden. The path looked perfect. No one would have dreamed it hid a forty-foot death trap going down into the bowels of the earth.

That was last Sunday night, the night the weather broke, if you remember. It was pelting down with rain in the morning, but I had to go out to establish my alibi. I caught the 10:15 bus into Kingsmarkham to be on the safe side. When Hedda says twelve noon, she means twelve noon and not a quarter past. But, by George, I was nervous, old man. I was shaking and my heart was drumming away. As soon as the Olive and Dove opened I went in and had a couple of what the doctor would have ordered if he'd been around to do an electrocardiograph. And I chatted with the barmaid to make sure she'd know me again.

At twelve sharp I beetled down to Moxon's. Couldn't have given a damn whether the car was ready or not, but if Moxon's people were talking to me face to face at noon, the police would know I couldn't have been at the farm pushing my wife down a well at noon, wouldn't they? The funny thing was, this mechanic chappie said my car had been taken back to the farm already. The boss had driven it over himself, he thought, though he couldn't be sure, having only just got in.

Well, that gave me a bit of a turn and I had a very nasty vision of poor old Moxon walking up to the house to find me and—however, I needn't have worried. I was just getting on the bus that took me back when I saw Moxon himself zoom by in his Land Rover with the towrope.

It was still pouring when I reached home. I nipped craftily round the back way and in by the garage. Hedda's Lincoln and my little Daf were there all right, the two of them snuggled up for all the world like a couple of cuddly creatures in the mating season.

Out of the garage I went on to my super new path. And it was as I'd planned—a big sagging hole edged with sopping wet turf where the well mouth was. I crept up to it as if something or someone might pop out and bite me. But nothing and no one did,

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and when I looked down I couldn't see a thing but a bottomless pit, old boy.

Never mind the rain, I thought. I'll get into my working togs, clear the well mouth of polythene, and call the police. Here is my wife's car, officer, but where is my wife? I suspect a tragic accident. Ah, yes, I have been out all morning in Kingsmarkham, as I can prove to you without the slightest difficulty.

I was fantasizing away like this, with the rain trickling down between my raincoat collar and my sweater, when there came—my Lord, I'll never forget it!—the most ear-splitting bellow from the house. In point of fact, from the kitchen window.

"Where the flaming hell have you been?" Only she didn't say "flaming," you know. "Are you out of your damned mind? I come here to find the place piled high with your filthy cigarette butts and not a duster over it for a fortnight. Where have you been?"

Hedda.

I nearly had a coronary. No, I'm not kidding. I had the first symptoms. Pain up my left side and in my arm. I thought I'd had it. I suppose the fact that Hedda and I do have a perfect diet, the very best of proteins and vitamins, stood me in good stead when it came to the nitty-gritty.

Well, I sort of staggered up the path and into the kitchen. There she was, hands on hips, looking like one of those what's-its—Furies or Valkyries or something. (Sorry, I've had a drop too much of your excellent Scotch.)

I could have done with a short snort at that moment. I didn't even get a cup of coffee.

"One hell of a landscape gardener you are," Hedda yelled at me. "A couple of drops of rain and your famous path caved in. Lucky for you it happened before I got here. I might have broken a leg."

A leg, ha ha! Of course I realized what had happened. The water had collected in a pool till the polythene had sagged and the battens finally had given way. I would have to run into a wet spell, wouldn't I, after the heat wave we'd been having?

"You didn't put enough of that hardcore down," said my wife in her psychopathic bird-of-prey voice. "Damn it, you live in the lap of luxury, never do a hand's turn but for that piddling-around-the-peonies column of yours, and you can't even fill in a damned well. You can get right out there this minute and start on it."

So that's what I did, old man. All that hardcore had to be hauled back by the barrow-load and tipped down the well. I

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worked on it all afternoon in the rain and all yesterday, and this morning I made another path. It's messed up my back properly, I can tell you. I felt the disk pop out while I was dropping the last hundredweight in.

Still, Hedda had bought me that German stereo system I've been dreaming of for years, so I mustn't grumble. She's not a bad sort really, and I can't complain that my every wish isn't catered to, provided I toe the line. (No, I'd better not have any more. I'm beginning to get double vision, thanks all the same.)

Lindsay? I expect her back on Monday and I suppose we'll just have to go as before. The funny thing is, she hasn't phoned since last Saturday, though she doesn't know Hedda's back. I called her sister's place this morning and the sister went into a long involved story about Lindsay going off, full of something about a surprise for someone—but Hedda came in and I had to ring off.

I can use your phone, old man? That's most awfully nice of you. I don't want the poor little sweet thinking I've dropped her out of my life forever.

"Q"

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